

THE DOUBLE-VISION OF IMAGINATION: AN APPRAISAL OF  
SURFACE AND SUBSTANCE IN THE FICTION OF HENRY JAMES

An Abstract of a Thesis by  
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August 1976  
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This study is concerned, primarily, with the faculty of the imagination, incidentally as a general concept, but chiefly in its application to the fictional and critical works of Henry James. A number of these works have been consulted with the intention of deriving, and subsequently illustrating, a coherent inquiry into "the creative intelligence" as it fulfills its roles as a source of inspiration and a learning aid for the author, and as an ingredient of theme through which James urges his characters toward self-discovery and a wide consciousness of the palpable and spiritual worlds outside themselves. Commensurate with this effort is the recognition (the implications of which are also shown) that the imagination, for James, was a double-chambered affair--one room containing the aesthetic "sense" and the other the capacity for a fine moral awareness--and that the "lucid reflector," the character most susceptible to enlightenment, must live simultaneously in both compartments.

The first chapter introduces and begins to trace the development of this dipolar imagination within one novel in particular, The Portrait of a Lady. This initial segment, by enlisting a few philosophical assertions of Immanuel Kant, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the psychologist, Carl G. Jung, also attempts to suggest the depth and breadth of the Jamesian purview of human nature and its potential for emotional and intellectual growth.

The second chapter concentrates upon the aesthetic stem of the imagination and, with evidence gathered from five novels and one long story--The American, The Tragic Muse, Roderick Hudson, The Princess Casamassima, The Europeans and "The Aspern Papers"--examines the possible uses and limitations of an appreciation of beauty and a strong sense of form and order among external appearances.

The third and final chapter incorporates analyses of six additional novels--The Sacred Fount, The Wings of the Dove, What Maisie Knew, The Spoils of Poynton, The Ambassadors and The Golden Bowl--with the purpose of determining

what constructive and/or destructive elements reside within the Jamesian characters who evince an operative familiarity with "the moral sense." In conjunction with this investigation of the imagination's second chamber, an attempt is made to describe, through example and proposition, the causes and effects of the creative synthesis whereby Henry James, through his characters and through the painstaking exercise of his craft, unites the love of external beauty and formal harmony with a compassionate affirmation of inner meaning and human responsibility.



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A Thesis  
Presented to  
The School of Graduate Studies  
Drake University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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## PREFACE

In order to eliminate repetitive footnotes, references to certain primary sources will be made contextually throughout this thesis. The following key will serve as a guide to those editions of Henry James's works which I have used.

- (Amb) The Ambassadors. 1903; rpt. New York: The New American Library, Signet Books, 1960.
- (A) The American. 1877; rpt. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., Riverside Edition, 1962.
- (AN) The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces. 1907-1909; rpt. intro. Richard P. Blackmur. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962.
- (AB) The Autobiography of Henry James. Containing A Small Boy and Others, 1913; Notes of a Son and Brother, 1917; and The Middle Years, 1917; ed. and intro. Frederick W. Dupee. New York: Criterion Books, 1956.
- (E) The Europeans. 1878; rpt., ed. and intro. Richard Poirier. New York: Signet Books, 1964.
- (GB) The Golden Bowl. 1904; rpt., ed. and intro. John Halperin. New York: Meridian Books, World Publishing, 1972.
- (PL) The Portrait of a Lady. 1881; rpt., ed. Leon Edel. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., Riverside Edition, 1963.
- (PC) The Princess Casamassima. 1886; 2 vols., 3rd ed., rev. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.
- (RH) Roderick Hudson. 1875; rpt. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969.
- (SF) The Sacred Fount. 1901; rpt. in Henry James: Three Novels. New York: A Perennial Classic, Harper & Row, 1968.

- (SP) The Spoils of Poynton. 1896; rpt. in Henry James: Three Novels. New York: A Perennial Classic, Harper & Row, 1968.
- (TM) The Tragic Muse. 1890; rpt., intro. R. P. Blackmur. New York: Dell Publishing, 1961.
- (WMK) What Maisie Knew. 1897; rpt. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., 1954.
- (WD) The Wings of the Dove. 1902; rpt., intro. F. W. Dupee. New York: Signet Classics, 1964.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This brief introduction has two purposes. First, it is intended to provide a concise statement of the central topic of this thesis on the fiction of Henry James, and, second, it will provide short summaries of the goals and analytic methods employed in each of the longer chapters to follow. This entire paper is concerned, primarily, with the faculty of the imagination, especially as that mode of perception applies to James's artistry and the artifacts which he uses in his fiction. The critical, autobiographical and philosophical assertions of Henry James will be consulted with a view toward discovering the ways in which he felt the imagination to be a useful tool for an author. Certain of his novels will be explored for the purpose of discerning the manners in which his many characters exercise their "creative intelligence" in the midst of the endless "surfaces" of life;<sup>1</sup> for the Jamesian imagination, it shall be shown, not only functions among appearances, but also delves to the roots of meaning and the bonds of interpersonal relationship that lie beneath.

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, The Selected Letters of Henry James, ed. and intro. Leon Edel (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Cudahy, 1955), p. 157.

My essential theme, the imagination, both as a general concept and in its specific Jamesian overtones, will be defined and illustrated at various points throughout this study and, consequently, requires little further discussion at this point. For the present, it seems more useful to draw an important distinction between the "rational" and "imaginative" properties of the mind. Within this effort at clarification, I shall also, with the help of Carl Gustav Jung, attempt to fix or place the creative powers of James within the broad continuum of literary inspiration.

James's fictions cannot be said, in the terms set forth by Jung, to depend upon any stimulus of "divine frenzy," nor are they revelatory (so far as I can see) of any "primordial experiences" so ultimate and so universal that they necessitate "ancient mythological imagery and monstrous . . . happenings" to give them form.<sup>1</sup> James, in the focus and reach of his imagination, is decidedly "psychological"--interested in "the vast realm of conscious human experience," the "vivid foreground of life," and the commingling of men in familiar social contexts--rather than "visionary."<sup>2</sup> Yet, his creative glimpses into the possibilities of men and matter transcend, inform and enliven the fact-filled, "practical" intelligence in a fashion quite similar to the ways

<sup>1</sup>Carl Gustav Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, trans. W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (1933; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

in which, in Jung's view, the sometimes "frightening revelations"<sup>1</sup> of Goethe, Blake and Dante break the molds of empirical thought and conventional logic.

Jung contends that the "social significance of art" is to expand the narrow "one-sidedness of the normal individual's consciousness" and gradually awaken good citizens to the deadening routine of "the general trend" and "general attitudes" of conformist thinking.<sup>2</sup> The "great"<sup>3</sup> artist accomplishes this by revealing, in all its nightmarish urgency, the wide range of terror, delight and dormant identities available to man. James, however, for all his "realism," strove to depict the mind always at the verge of greater consciousness in this very same, ongoing act of self-discovery and expansion. The imaginative potencies he brought to the task of writing, and those corresponding powers he prescribed for the best of his fictional creatures, may incorporate few radical "visions" . . . from the innermost soul" and the nether regions of "the collective unconscious."<sup>4</sup> But they do, indeed, (as

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>Carl Gustav Jung, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry," (1922); rpt. in The Portable Jung, ed. and intro. Joseph Campbell, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 322.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 319.



I hope to show) awaken the potential for fundamental discoveries in the regions of self-awareness and human interaction. James, no less than his visionary counterparts, tried not only to expand the intellect, but also to depict, in detail, the severe handicaps and omissions of mentalities which are limited to abstract categories and lists of inanimate facts.

A word must also be said about James's compositional technique, which, as Edward Wasiolek claims, is predicated upon the assumption "that one see life not with the delimiting, systemizing and abstract faculties of the mind" but with the "retina of the mind's sensitive reflection of . . . a myriad forms."<sup>1</sup> This presumption, that the reader should be "asked to participate" in and be limited to the observations of a consciousness embedded in the narrative itself--a "reflector" rather than an interpreter of surrounding human poses and snatches of overheard dialogue who has not the directional benefit of an "omniscient voice"--helps James produce an illusion of immediate experience, an "immense and exquisite correspondence with life,"<sup>2</sup> in his stories. Yet, many readers

<sup>1</sup>Edward Wasiolek, "Tolstoy's 'The Death of Ivan Ilytch' and Jamesian Fictional Imperatives," Modern Fiction Studies, 5, No. 2 (1961), 315.

<sup>2</sup>Henry James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, (1907-1909; rpt., intro. Richard P. Blackmur, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 340.

Wasiolek among them, would insist that James purchases this existential atmosphere at the price of an unsettling ambiguity which pervades his constructions of character and theme. The works of many of James's predecessors in the development of the English novel--figures such as Thackeray, George Eliot and Anthony Trollope--embodied frequent "authorial intrusions"<sup>1</sup> and philosophical asides that left the reader with little doubt in his identifications of heroes and villains, appropriate lessons and gists of thought--but which left a strong impression of adventures already fully digested by the mind and heart of their particular creator. James's insistence, on the other hand, that "subject matter be pictured and not interpreted" leaves his characters, and his readers, in Wasiolek's opinion, pretty much to their own devices as they struggle to understand their human and physical environments.

Such postulations about method have become commonplace for the student of James and they, like many oversimplifications, are accurate only to a point. Ian Watt, for example, has noted, in his close textual examination of The Ambassadors, that James skirted, rather than revoked omniscience by developing a "split narrative point of view"<sup>2</sup> which allowed him to blend the viewpoint of the

<sup>1</sup>Wasiolek, p. 315.

<sup>2</sup>Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph of The Ambassadors: An Explication," Essays in Criticism, 10 (July 1960), 254-68; rpt. in Albert E. Stone, Jr. ed. "The Ambassadors":

"knowing and informing"<sup>1</sup> author with the often bemused and tentative perspectives of his central characters. Similarly, James only acquired this deft semblance of unobtrusiveness gradually as his craftsmanship increased. His earlier novels, such as The Bostonians, do employ direct statements by the author, who, in the first-person, the unmistakable guise of "I," is forced to acknowledge that he "shall be under the necessity of imparting much occult information."<sup>2</sup> Yet, even though James cannot hide himself entirely at this early stage, he tries to convey as much of this information through the impressions of his characters as possible.

Regardless how much we qualify, however, there is no escaping the fact that James's goal was to "make each presented occasion tell all its story itself" (AN 111). Instead of being weakened by ambiguity, he used it, as Henry Adams perceives, to "turn the lights of his burning-glass on alternate sides of the same figure."<sup>3</sup> James did, to paraphrase T. S. Eliot, avoid the placement of obvious

A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 83.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Henry James, The Bostonians (1886); rpt., intro. Irving Howe (New York: Random House, Inc., 1956), p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams, (1918); 2nd ed., intro. James Truslow Adams (New York: Random House, The Modern Library, 1931), p. 163.

and separable "ideas" in most of his fiction,<sup>1</sup> either through his authorial role or in the thoughts of his figures. Joseph Warren Beach is also substantially correct when he insists that James attempted to engage in "complex or multiple studies" which offered no absolutes, but left his "registers" and his themes open to "any number of aspects under which they may be viewed and named."<sup>2</sup> This is not to say, however, that James's works cannot be carefully searched for clues and ideas, and finally be regarded with a relative certainty of accurate analysis. The history of Jamesian criticism is replete (the present study being no exception) with commentaries made by auditors who believe they have discerned the bias of the novelist's oblique voice.

Still, without irrefutable thematic guidelines and authorial directives, an interpretation of James's fiction is delicate work. In my view, the Jamesian novel, being at best somewhat problematic, bears an apt analogy to the image of the African coastline which Joseph Conrad, in Heart of Darkness, impresses upon the mind of Charles Marlow. This notion seems farfetched, no doubt, until we consider what the looming continent represents to Marlow, the sailor, as

<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, "In Memory," The Little Review, 5 (August 1918), 44-53; rpt. in Jerry Don Vann, ed. Critics in Henry James (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1972), p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James, 2nd ed. (1918); rpt. (Philadelphia: Albert Seifert Publications, 1954), pp. 131-132.

he gazes landward from the deck of a tramp steamer. He likes to conjecture, from a distance, about what the various settlements hold in store for foreign visitors; and he bases his guesses not upon a detailed and precise knowledge of the place, but upon his experience of other ports and upon his awareness of Africa as a whole. The land is primitive and dangerous (filled with "savages" and "jungle"), yet supports the "customhouses" and "clerks" of modern commerce.<sup>1</sup> The intense rivalries of internationalism (betokened by "flag" and "soldiers" coexist with the settled usages of civilizations "centuries old."<sup>2</sup> For Marlow, Africa is a land where contradictions are wed and history is compressed into one eternal moment. Nearly all habitable climates, all forms of government, and all the stages of human evolution (if such there be) are conjoined there. It might be said that this continent displays the entire range of human effort and error in its living hugeness, much as literature records that long history between the covers of countless volumes. The Jamesian canon is obviously less extensive and all-inclusive than the whole of literature or Africa; but it does offer a wide range of alternatives to the central characters who wish to learn, within the wide compass of its pages, how to think and how to behave. Moreover, James's

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, rpt. in ed. and intro. Morton Dauwen Zabel, The Portable Conrad (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 505.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

fiction, like Marlow's mental image of Africa, is a region where meanings are only implied and must be traced through the sensitivity, past experience and imagination of the rapt observer.

The initial chapter of the three to follow intends, in part, to delineate the spectrum of thought and feeling available to (in other words, evidenced by) James's characters. Since the writings of James, like Marlow's multifarious continent, invite the reader/traveler to "Come and find out"<sup>1</sup> rather than to sit and be taught, I have employed many assertions from a number of thinkers--philosophers, psychologists and poets--whose opinions and terminologies approximate, at least for me, the many levels of the human conditions which James, via the figures of men and women he created for his fiction, illustrates in action rather than defines in overt speculations. More precisely the aid of these outside authorities has been enlisted in order to evaluate and build a conceptual framework for one novel in particular: The Portrait of a Lady. I refer to this single work almost exclusively in the first chapter for three reasons: first, in order to consider, at length, at least one James novel; secondly, because Isabel Archer is--with respect to the perspectives of this study--a seminal character in James's vast company; and, lastly, because The Portrait stacks up nicely against Arthur Conan Doyle's

<sup>1</sup>Conrad, p. 505.

The Hound of the Baskervilles, a story which is used in the hope of drawing, with more exactitude, the lower boundaries of James's art.

Simply put, Doyle's famous mystery tale helps, through a series of comparisons and contrasts with James's novel, show how two literary efforts with comparable atmospheres of "immediacy"<sup>1</sup>--one being bound up in the exigencies of picture and scene and the other subservient to the demands of ingeniously veiled clues, the requirements of a brain twister--can evince surprising structural parallels, yet differ dramatically in scope and substance. Finally, the first chapter introduces and begins to develop the concept that a dipolar imagination, consisting of both an aesthetic and a moral stem, plays an integral part in the unfolding of James's artistry and contributes toward an understanding of his intentions and achievements in fiction.

The second chapter takes up the aesthetic chamber of the imagination and, with evidence-gathering scrutinies of five novels--The American, Roderick Hudson, The Tragic Muse, The Princess Casamassima, and The Europeans, and one long story, "The Aspern Papers"--examines the uses, possibilities and limitations of what Henry James called "a sense of value

<sup>1</sup>The notion of "immediacy" or the "circuitously present" event was one of the ideals of technique, a precise quality of tone, mentioned by James in his "Preface to The Ambassadors," rpt. in The Art of the Novel, p. 319.

. . . in the outward character" and "the spectacle" of life.<sup>1</sup>

The third and final chapter incorporates analyses of six additional novels--The Sacred Fount, What Maisie Knew, The Spoils of Poynton, The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl--with the purpose of investigating the constructive and destructive potentialities of the imagination's other zone, "the moral sense" (AN 149). Also included in this concluding section is an attempt to describe, by example and by proposition, the causes and the effects of the creative synthesis whereby James, through his characters and through his craft, unites the love of beauty and formal harmony with a compassionate affirmation of human responsibility.

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, The American Scene, (1907); rpt., intro. Irving Howe (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), pp. 96-99.



## CHAPTER II

### HENRY JAMES, THE DETECTIVE "WHO WANTS TO KNOW MORE THAN THE EVIDENCE SUPPLIES"<sup>1</sup>

In the first "Appendix" to his study, Practical Criticism, I. A. Richards makes a passing reference to the literary genre known as "the detective type,"<sup>2</sup> and mentions Arthur Conan Doyle and Henry James as two of its leading proponents. Initially, such a correlation, so casually placed, evokes perhaps more divergencies than similarities between the pair, both as private men and as authors. Yet Richards clarifies his perspective and, in a sense, equates Doyle and James when he attributes "conjecture, or the weight of what is left unsaid" to both of them as their primary "writer's weapon."<sup>3</sup> Apart from "anything the writer has said," and barring "any feelings he has expressed," Richards detects a correspondence of functional form, of the "order . . . given to various parts of the composition,"<sup>4</sup> whereby both the creator of Sherlock

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, Percy Lubbock, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 356.

<sup>2</sup>I. A. Richards, Practical Criticism (1929); rpt. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), p. 334.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

Holmes and the creator of Isabel Archer (among many others) may occupy quite different worlds of thought and emotion, yet share in creating a pervasive atmosphere of contrived suspense.

Obviously, when one fails to account for the quality of thought and the veracity of the feelings expressed in any fictional work, only a few structural bones remain to rummage among. Accordingly, Richards dismisses the question of "order" pertaining to relative merit, either in competency of execution or in depth and uniqueness of perception. From this viewpoint, James and Doyle are alike only in blazing "the false trail" and building the "misleading hope,"<sup>1</sup> as their respective stories unwind through ambiguous hints of character and circumstance to resolutions uncertain until attained. This view likewise implies that the element of suspense lies at the very heart of the fictional efforts of both men, and for the same reason: namely, its own somewhat simplistic sake. While the mysterious situation concocted for mystery's sake may go some distance toward explaining the existence of Doyle's detective tales, it will be a partial purpose of this discussion to show that whatever suspense builds in Jamesian fiction is of another nature, and dedicated to a different purpose than that which attends the investigations of Sherlock Holmes.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

Nevertheless, there is a solid grain of accuracy in Richards' remarks. The works of Doyle and James do offer remarkable parallels in structure and device, as the explanations to follow will try to show. In fact, a detailed comparison between these writers' works, or more precisely, between two works in particular--The Portrait of a Lady and The Hound of the Baskervilles--will constitute a major motif throughout this chapter. In this way, via a close textual examination and the benefit of a sustained study in comparison, it is hoped that the texture and structure of Jamesian fiction, both in the particular case and in general, will begin to emerge. Such a formula demands, however, that The Portrait be regarded, in many respects, as a production highly typical of James. It is not the purpose of this study to establish that typicality, although brief connections will be attempted, from time to time, between the single novel emphasized here and portions of the large remaining body of James's work.

Richards does not specify the various ploys and stratagems employed by the makers of detective fiction. They are, however, in the case of Conan Doyle and a few other practitioners, fairly common and easily recognized. They include, first, the false witness who, in an attempt to conceal ulterior motives, tries to mislead the investigator/protagonist with half-truths; secondly, the intimidated or misinformed witness who, with the best

intentions or worst fears, tries to enlighten with half-truths; and, finally, the confusing jumble of objects which remain mere props to all but the keen mind which has learned to detect those that bear the telltale signs of identity.

Each author/sleuth provides a unique atmosphere for his hero(es) to query around in, and each of these famous crime-solvers specializes in a certain technique of detection which becomes synonymous with his character--a sort of trademark. For example, the famous Auguste Dupin, brain-child of Edgar Allen Poe, characteristically solves criminal conundrums from his armchair, seated silently in the daylight darkness of his curtained, crumbling mansion, and giving one ear to the metaphysical speculations of his friend, the narrator of the story.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, such intellectual precocity resides at the opposite extreme from the hard-fisted, tough-guy school of "private eyes," wherein such notables as Mike Hammer and Philip Marlow succeed in their profession chiefly through the virtues of a granite jaw, dogged perseverance, and an abrupt way with the ladies. In each case, however, the erstwhile shamus, often a strange combination of knight-errant and misanthropic cowboy, has to wade through a host of people and objects who, respectively, do not know what is going on, do know but are not telling,

<sup>1</sup>Three of Poe's famous detective yarns, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," and "The Purloined Letter" fully illustrate the tendencies mentioned. All can be found in Poe's Tales of Mystery and Terror (New York: Lancer Books, Inc., 1967).

or can (or cannot) provide an essential physical key to the solution of a given crime. Always false trails are laid, and always something is withheld or hidden in a maze of conflicting evidence until the expert deftly picks it out and produces a solution before our startled eyes. While in no way an exhaustive analysis of the detective genre in fiction, this discussion has attempted to point out some of the elements which directly contribute to the sense of "conjecture"--the building weight of all that is systematically left unseen and "unsaid"--as the universal modus operandi of such literature. From this perspective, the work of Conan Doyle still serves as one of the best examples of how a detective story constructs suspense. Moreover--to bring the neglected main topic, Henry James, back into focus--the fact that Doyle's "Hound" and James's Portrait dovetail structurally helps to explain why these works, in particular, will be given subsequent emphasis. It also helps to narrow the wide array of workmen in the detective fiction field down to one representative, Doyle, so that parallel elements of contrived suspense in the works of both writers may be traced to their implications in the theory and practice of Henry James.

One remaining point must be attended to, however, before comparison can begin. While it is highly doubtful that James patently belongs to the brotherhood of fictional detectives, his presence in the larger fraternity of mystery

writers is fairly well established. Certain of his stories, such as "The Turn of the Screw" and "The Figure In the Carpet," can be provisionally described as mysteries which deal with the tension between subjective and objective reality and a problematic initiation into the appreciation of art, respectively. Moreover, most of James's fiction reflects what William H. Gass calls "the terrible difficulties of vision and knowledge, of personal construction and actual fact,"<sup>1</sup> wherein all the tools of complication outlined above, and more, come into play. James simply does not fit into any of the convenient niches carved out for tales of mystery. If he is no ordinary detective, he is no more obviously a gothic romancer, for even his ghosts (few as they are) do not know whether or not they really exist.<sup>2</sup> James employs, as shall be shown, the elements of mystery and ambiguity for his own unique ends.

Now, for the purpose of illustrating the techniques whereby suspense is manufactured, we turn to a concise synopsis of one of Arthur Conan Doyle's most famous tales. In The Hound of the Baskervilles Sherlock Holmes has the difficult task of solving the apparent murder of one Sir

<sup>1</sup>William H. Gass, "The High Brutality of Good Intentions," Accent, 18 (Winter 1958), rpt. in Naomi Lebowitz, ed., Discussions of Henry James (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1962), pp. 89-90.

<sup>2</sup>Examples of Henry James's ghost stories are "The Turn of the Screw," "The Great Good Place," "The Jolly Corner," and the unfinished novel, The Sense of the Past.

Charles Baskerville. The man who initially enlists Holmes's help in the case, Dr. James Mortimer, is a well-intentioned, but misguided bearer of superstitious theories. Although ostensibly "a man of science,"<sup>1</sup> Mortimer is glibly swayed by a daemonic curse which allegedly dooms all the heirs to the affluent Baskerville family estate. Holmes, of course, is disinclined to the "supernaturalist's" view, but the reader, whose mind may be more impressionable than the logical detective's, is provided an admixture of hard, relevant facts in an ambience of horror by the physician's account of a huge dog, the agent of the devil, who tears out his victims' throats. Thus the good, if unsophisticated, doctor unwittingly drags a red herring across the unknown criminal's path. A second diversion is provided by the suspicious behavior of the Barrymores, the servants at Baskerville Hall, who lead the narrator, Dr. Watson, and the reader astray while furtively aiding Mrs. Barrymore's brother --an escaped convict who is hiding on the moors surrounding the mansion.

These complications, engendered by the inaccurate or withheld testimony of ignorant or intimidated witnesses,

Much critical controversy has centered about the question as to whether James actually wrote about spirits or uncanny psychological states. For a summation of this quandary see Henry James: A Reader's Guide, by S. Gorley Putt (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 396-99.

<sup>1</sup>Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, The Complete Sherlock Holmes, intro. Christopher Morley (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1930), p. 671. All subsequent references to the Holmes' tales will be taken from this text and incorporated, by page number, within the context of this study.

are further thickened by the actual culprit, Mr. Stapleton, who fools most of the company throughout by his imposture as a quaint and wholly absorbed student of "botany and zoology." This self-styled naturalist, keeper and trainer of the all-too-real hound that works Stapleton's murderous will, constitutes the false witness who intentionally misleads his fellows with a disguised past and occupation. The reader, who is pretty much in Watson's confused shoes, has to contend not only with false or misleading testimony and suspicious behavior, but also with a welter of concrete objects--a skull, a mysterious letter, strange lights on the horizon and old stone huts on the hillside--whose significance it is impossible to ascertain until Holmes finally draws them all together in his solution.

Meanwhile, near the end of the novel, after Holmes has gathered evidence and formulated his coherent theory offstage, the redoubtable sleuth makes a key discovery. One of the many family portraits in the mansion--that of the "wicked Hugo, who started the Hound of the Baskerville's" (H 749) and drew the horrible curse upon his progeny--provides the piece that completes the puzzle. This painting is, but for the beard, a perfect likeness of Stapleton. Therefore, as Holmes observes, the naturalist can only be a member of the Baskerville family who has concealed his identity for nefarious reasons. The detective's research rules out coincidence, and establishes



the connections: Stapleton is really the son of the long missing Roger Baskerville who, with the aid of the deadly dog, has been planning to murder all those who stood between himself and the family fortune. The "chance of the picture" has provided "the missing link" (H 750) for a final resolution to the episode.

It now remains to show how and why Henry James, in an imaginative universe so different from Doyle's, incorporates analogous techniques of structure and character formation. Parallels may be culled almost at random from within the broad body of James's fiction, but, as has been asserted earlier, "The Hound" and The Portrait of a Lady have particular procedural affinities. On the other hand, this is not to suggest that either author was in any way influenced by the other, for, to my knowledge, there is no record that either was familiar with the other's writings. I only wish to suggest that James, in his struggles as a creative writer, developed a Weltanschauung, or pattern of interpretive thought whose embodiment in fiction incidentally approximated some of the ingenious formulae which are universal in detective stories, and which may never have found better expression, within the confines of that genre, than in the tales of Conan Doyle.<sup>1</sup> In what manner,

<sup>1</sup>It is a fact, however, and a little-publicized one, that James was fond of reading the case histories of notorious criminals. Less interested in the gory details

then, are Doyle's methods also James's?

Ralph Touchett, in The Portrait of a Lady is a good-natured and well-intentioned man whose impulse to divide his inheritance (some 60,000 Pounds) with his pretty American cousin, Isabel Archer, reveals both his generosity and a far-reaching misconception on his part. Ralph believes that the stipulated sum will serve to "free" Isabel from the pressure of "marrying for money"<sup>1</sup> when, in fact (and to his increasing horror), it impels the "morally inflammable" young lady to "transfer the weight of it to some other conscience" (PL 190). Isabel thinks she has found a more mature judgment than her own, a "fine mind" reinforced by a character "noble" and "supremely indifferent to worldly prizes" (PL 287), in the fastidious person of Gilbert Osmond. She marries this self-enmeshed dilettante in a fury of righteousness, and exposes Ralph, "sick and ashamed" (PL 288), to the reader and to himself as a man self-beguiled. As his father suggested when Ralph first

that a "strong sense for sequences and the proper march order and time" and the "tantalizing" way in which law-breakers often kept authorities in suspenseful ignorance, James gives some credence to the contention that he may have appropriated some elements from detective literature. Even had he not consciously done so, his fascination with the chase discloses, I think, an appetite for gradual disclosure in a story. The particulars of James's interest and the resources for the quotes above may be found in the author's correspondence with William Roughead, as they are collected and printed in The Letters of Henry James, [Vol. II, pp. 356 and 371].

<sup>1</sup> Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady, (1881); rpt., Leon Edel, ed. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., Riverside Edition, 1963), p. 158.

proposed the scheme to make the American girl independently wealthy, the semi-invalid is "in love with her" (PL 159). Prevented by his ill-health from actively seeking her hand, the young man settles for an indirectly influential role in Isabel's life. If he cannot be a physical husband and keep unworthy suitors away by his favored presence, he will "compensate" himself through a spiritual husbandry of her virtues in a crystal dome of his own design. His beneficence will keep the scoundrels away while Isabel indulges her inclination "to see life" (PL 132). Ralph misinterprets both her motives and his own. While unwittingly smoothing Isabel's way toward a course which "but for her money [she] would never have taken" (PL 351), he rationalizes his interference on the grounds--soothing to his sense of exclusion, yet just a trifle selfish--of "meeting the requirements of [his] imagination" (PL 161). Ralph takes a risk he has no warrant to assume by gambling with another person's life. By putting his cousin in the way of "fortune-hunters" (PL 159) and neglecting to fully consider her nature, he reacts subjectively. Emotion clouds his vision, just as superstitious fears paralyze the mind of Doyle's Dr. Mortimer.

Both Mortimer and Ralph are misleading witnesses in the worlds they propose to interpret; yet, the younger Touchett, in his manifestations of unconscious selfishness and overt sympathy, is deeply involved, for all his physical disability, in the many lives which inhabit James's novel.

Sir Henry Baskerville's doctor, on the other hand, serves as mere pretext to advance the plot and to incorporate into the narrative the chilling atmosphere of a ghost story. Ralph, in his being, contributes a continuity of evolving existence within the framework of interlocking personae in The Portrait. He acts and reacts throughout, learning and teaching within the crucible of relationships through which the novel's plot moves. He suffers for the omissions and excesses he perpetrates, and reaps the rewards of his "imagination of loving" (PL 44)--that capacity to invest himself in the joys and agonies of others--in a final kinship of affection between himself and the troubled woman he has loved so long (PL 471). Although he "had played the wrong card" (PL 323) with Isabel, and although she had often been irritated by his views, Ralph participates in the growing disillusionment and pain of her marriage "just as if [he] had fallen himself" (PL 285) into the trap. The tentacles of young "Touch-it's" empathetic thought and fellow-feeling stretch widely. Although they find their deepest attachment in Isabel, they also, after taking account of the discrepancies in nature, need and capacity, extend to most of the other clustered figures in the book. Dr. Mortimer, on the contrary, disappears soon after fulfilling his original, somewhat mechanical role.

The parallel developments of plot and character do not stop there. Gilbert Osmond and Serena Merle are both

analogous to Mr. Stapleton in that they perform the function of the false witnesses whose testimony, in idea and behavior, is an unreliable guide to life because it is sheathed in deceit. Essentially, however, they differ from the evil naturalist in the same degree that Ralph diverges from the pasteboard figure, Mortimer. Stapleton is motivated in his criminality by unmixd brutality and greed. His character, when unmasked, is transparently malevolent; and the better part of his life, apart from the engineering of murders, is spent in the shaping of that mask. He achieves no philosophy of life, nor does he analyze himself. Rather, he fabricates an alias, manufactures a profession and a false past, and enlists an old family legend to cover his tracks while responding to the simple, deadly urge which animates his soul. He also conforms to the timeless, and totally unimaginative wisdom of the primitive criminal mind which admonishes the evildoer simply to keep out of sight. Stapleton and his wife, whom he bullies into acquiescence with his plans, reside in a lonely farmhouse near the edge of a dangerous bog, far from spying eyes. Although Madame Merle and Osmond do not go to these extremes, have not plotted any murders and do not even conspire to perform anything strictly illegal, there are some similarities to be drawn between them and the fiendish villain. Stapleton, for example, rearranges his past in order to pass himself off as an ingenuous botanist whose former failure as a

schoolmaster was precipitated by epidemic rather than, as was the actual case, through his own "infamous" (H 762) mismanagement. Serena also covers her trail when she obscures the history of her relationship with Osmond for Isabel's ears. The respectable widow represents him as merely "a friend" (PL 169) and depicts herself, deprecatingly, as a harmless trafficker in "memories, graces, talents" fashioned to "get her through the hours" and into "great houses" as a sort of transitory but picturesque decoration (PL 171). As her true story unfolds, however, the reader and Isabel come to recognize the blight of lies and the thorn of ulterior motives ringing this faded flower.

Osmond shares a trait or two with Stapleton as well. Both live in relative seclusion, albeit for different reasons, and both cultivate the reputation of transcendent expertise in chosen fields of intellectual endeavor--the former as an art collector and self-appointed "incarnation of taste" (PL 286), and the latter as a scientist with "the most complete . . . collection of Lepidoptera in the southwest of England" (H 711). The semblances are soon curtailed, however, as consideration is given to the further treatment these men receive at their respective creators' hands. Unlike Doyle's naturalist, Osmond, and Madame Merle as well, are not driven to violate legal codes. They are not criminals in the ordinary sense, which Isabel comes to realize as their collusion becomes apparent to her. They violate

not laws, but trust--the most intimate bond of human relationships. They do not lie overtly; they simply distort the truth by deletion and exaggeration. Madam Merle, for instance, interprets Osmond for Isabel as a gentleman "most delightful" and "very distinguished" (PL 169), while suppressing not only the full story of her liaison (present and past) with the man, but also her honest opinion of him.<sup>1</sup> (PL 427). In the same vein, Osmond neglects to inform Isabel that her wealth constitutes a prime incentive for his proposal of marriage (PL 254). He also forgets to mention that he expects his wife to submit "to be changed" by his resolute influence into a mere echo of "his ambitions, his opinions, his preferences" (PL 355). These two have hidden reserves of design and temperament which Stapleton does not suggest. His malevolence is vaguely attributable to genetic determinism; he inherited an evil strain of the Baskerville line.

Henry James, much more than Doyle, is intrigued by the emotional and conceptual underpinnings of his "subject." Osmond and Merle are each substantially more complex and, consequently, more believable than stock villains who serve as superficial pretexts for the cunning display of some

<sup>1</sup>She considers Osmond, in his "studied coldness" and self-serving attitudes, "very bad." Also, having confessed to Isabel that she, Serena, has, in effect, made her unhappy marriage to a money-hungry "adventurer," Mme. Merle feels cruelly guilty. She charges Osmond with having "made me as bad as yourself." (PL 428)

unexamined and malignant quality of human nature. Attention to Serena Merle, for instance, reveals an intricate nature that partakes of life on many levels. She has an aesthetic side, for she paints and plays piano with "skill" and "feeling" (PL 149), if not with complete absorption. She has discrimination and sensitivity enough to develop great "tact" (PL 164), and expresses herself effectually, both verbally and physically, in "judicious" (PL 162) phrases and in gestures and dress appropriate to any occasion (PL 165). She has had the presence of mind to learn and, for the most part, to adapt herself to her place and role in life (PL 164). Her knowledge has not been all fortunate, however. She is, and always has been, overly impressed by the pageantry of life's "appearances" and too little enticed by the meanings which lie beneath them. She has been taught by hard experience to place herself at "the convenience of her auditors" (PL 165)--those more influential and more securely placed than herself.

She has also, unfortunately, learned how to manipulate the impressions of naive young ladies. Yet, if her character is all too imperfect, she retains a vestige of a most significant faculty: she can, to some extent, still participate, with a trace of empathy, in the misfortunes of others. Her collusion is somewhat mitigated by its goal--to provide a fit mother for Pansy, who is unaware



that Serena is her real mother and who does not even like her (PL 455)--and by her capacity to feel a feeble sympathy for Isabel, "that precious object" (PL 428) whom she has helped doom to an unhappy marriage.

Whatever opprobrium attaches to her is tempered by Madame Merle's final damning insight into herself. Due to her general habit of neglect for whatever messages might be gleaned from a penetration beyond the glossy surfaces of life, Serena is unfit for profound introspection; yet what she manages is undissembling. Her glimpse inward shows her that she has been "vile" and will soon "be severely taught the disadvantages of a false position" (PL 429). This is well so far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. If Serena bows out "unhappy," she also bows out "proud" (PL 456). Her awareness of guilt leaves her basically unenlightened; for her mind, while quick, has been too long shallow and self-enmeshed to permit much transformation. Her sorrow is a measure of regret and humiliation at being unmasked and deposed (PL 356); and, since she "cannot weep" with a "dried up soul" (PL 427), it is rather more than a gauge of remorse for wrongdoing. Whereas Mme. Merle goes into exile with a remnant of dignity, we feel that Isabel is fully justified in wishing "never to see her again" (PL 456).

Another, and more important, comparison will be drawn to its conclusion at this point. Osmond, the other

half of the Jamesian parallel to the evil Stapleton, must be given the full attention his case deserves. The most salient fact of Osmond's existence is his rigidity. His human substructure--the labyrinthine network of connections, both emotive and ideational, which allow a sentient being to expand into new modes of awareness via different spheres of thought and affection--is fused by a hard ego-centricity. The self-annointed "first gentleman in Europe" (PL 353), who has a desperate need to believe himself "better than anyone else" (PL 351), cannot, by the exclusivity of his own definition, admit to any potential for expansion or alteration. When the reader finds him, Osmond considers himself flawless, and perfection cannot be improved upon. Unlike Serena Merle, whose response to life has left her emotionally drained due to her deficiency in vision (raging, through her history, against injustices she cannot fathom), Osmond becomes wooden in his self-imposed theory of splendid immobility: "for him nothing in life was a prize" (PL 345). From this point of view, Osmond seems similar to Stapleton not only by virtue of his role, but also in the character, or lack of it, prescribed for him. Yet this impression is misleading; for Stapleton's vacuity results from his creator's forbearance to put anything in, while Osmond's emptiness is thematically deliberate and quite significant when measured against the relative fullness of many of his companions.

Isabel, in fact, is the primary index for calculating both the degree and the implications of Osmond's elitism. At the beginning of the book, this pair exist roughly on the same level of receptivity. Isabel, for all her professed "love of knowledge," had "the finest capacity for ignorance" (PL 171). She had a natural aversion to the uglinesses, "the unlightened corners" (PL 171), of life, and she fears experience because it might be "poisoned" (PL 132). Moreover, she is a fierce idealist who believes that "nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me" (PL 173), and who spends most of her time "planning out her development, desiring her perfection, observing her progress" (PL 55). Osmond and Isabel, early on, both live within a narrow "system" or "theory"; Isabel, in fact, lives within several (PL 140). The young lady, however, learns from experience to modify and broaden her views in compliance with a widely disseminated vision, while Osmond sits fixedly in self-worship. As Isabel matures, she transcends the spirit which "adores a moat" (PL 100) and the isolation it provides.

Henry James, in The Portrait of a Lady, as well as throughout his fiction, depicts those who, like the immature Isabel or the stagnating Mrs. Touchett, have "fallen into gratuitous and exaggerated scruples" (PL 122) and constricted systems. He has likewise traced, in more than one setting, the unhappy lives of those who, like Madame Merle, have

fallen into the blind routine of a single role. Osmond, however, personifies the worst of both tendencies. His closed system of personal aggrandizement results in spiritual petrification. Immanuel Kant, in A Critique of Pure Reason<sup>1</sup> makes reference to two modes of self-consciousness. There is a self-consciousness which regards the self dispassionately, as one more object in the manifold of external phenomena. This objectified self, which must continually incorporate the deductions and concepts gleaned from the empirical sensitivity, constitutes a positive and tenable addition to the sum of our understanding. Subjective self-consciousness, on the other hand, breaks the continuum of being and "thus can only produce an intuition of itself."<sup>2</sup> If engaged in extensively, egocentricity will stifle the mind's capacity to grow and yet give "no knowledge of myself as I am, but only as I appear to myself."<sup>3</sup> Those who sever themselves thus from external standards, like Osmond, have nothing but "contempt" (PL 353) for other people, other ideas. Those who lose interest in acquiring objectivity and new information by forming new concepts and new estimations of their position in an ever-expanding world become, again like Osmond, prisoners unto themselves. At

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, (1781); rpt., trans. F. Max Muller (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, 1966), p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

the appropriate place this commentary will relate a few of the choices which James provides for Isabel's awakening curiosity and, thereby, indicate how much Osmond, to his harm, has chosen to abjure. For the moment, however, the issue of internality having arisen, we shall turn to the inner processes which accompany the acquisition and pursuit of knowledge.

It behooves us now to consider more closely how we know. What instruments do we use in order that we may perceive? A number of these mental tools may be briefly mentioned. The reason, for example, which constructs judgments as the building blocks of understanding, and the rudimentary imagination, which combines sensory data into elementary concepts, are familiar processes for gathering knowledge. Carl Jung, in Modern Man in Search of a Soul, introduces additional operations which individualize the cognition process. In Jung's view, "feeling" imposes an intimation of "value" upon the abstracted meanings which the mind manufactures from the influx of sensation. Furthermore, "intuition," a propensity which varies with each perceiver, "points to the possibilities of the whence and whither that lie within the immediate facts."<sup>1</sup> This intuition is obviously not any pre-rational process which

<sup>1</sup>Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 93.

automatically coordinates objects with minute mental images, but a highly developed facet of rationality which is commonly considered a necessary integument for advanced intelligence. It corresponds to an ability to learn from experience, and to plan ahead in accordance with the patterns of the past.

The insight which separates this list--sensation, feeling, thinking and intuition--from the old Faculty Psychology and, at the same time, makes it a complex index for analysis of the individual, is comprehended in Jung's principle of interaction. These capacities are not discrete mental factories which churn out independent notes of perception. Rather, they work in unison, in the ideal human organism, to give a multifaceted grasp of the layers of "types" of experience available to man. In practice, however, Jung finds that one or another function is commonly over-emphasized at the expense of the others. For example, the sensationalist, he finds, is often unintuitive, and a "one-sided emphasis on thinking is always accompanied by an inferiority in feeling."<sup>1</sup> As a case in point, Jung discloses that a familiar form of this imbalance often occurs in middle-age when, due to societal pressures and patterns of conformity, people find that they have ignored whole segments of their being. For instance, crisis in marriage

<sup>1</sup>Jung, p. 93.

often ensues "when the husband discovers his tender feelings, and the wife her sharpness of mind."<sup>1</sup>

Although this last example does not precisely describe Osmond's situation, that gentleman has reached middle-age (PL 210 and 273) by the time Isabel and the reader encounter him in his Italian villa, and the gradual erosion of his potential in all four quadrants of awareness has long since begun. Ironically, Osmond, who is so full of himself in a subjective sense, has lost all objective realization of his powers for growth. He does not qualify as a sensationalist; for, while he has sired two children, he has obviously done so in the line of duty rather than from a sense of any enjoyment in the task. As, in his own words, "the most fastidious gentleman living" (PL 223), Osmond's demeanor consists of a "cold-blooded" decorum (PL 231) tantamount to "rigidity" (PL 354). His neatly tailored image of "connoisseurship" (PL 220), which should testify to a highly selective susceptibility to sensations, is but a "pose" (PL 325). After his lucrative marriage he expresses an irritated indifference to the "old pots and plates" (PL 303) which he has painstakingly assembled over the years. Osmond's manufactured tastes, like his picture frames, are "pedantically primitive" (PL 193); they are garnered from authoritative volumes and arrayed to impress

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

others rather than to express his inner self.

In the realm of feeling, Osmond is up to his customary standard of imposture. He cultivates the appearance of a father "luxuriously mild" in matters of discipline (PL 334), and has appropriated the forms of "amenity" and "good-nature" (PL 353). Yet, beneath his "trained" exterior lurks, as Isabel finally discovers, a monumental "egotism" (PL 353) with a ruthlessness to match. He wishes to appear the soul of "delicate kindness" (PL 269), but has, in reality, "ceased to form attachments" or "to feel attractions" for other people (PL 217). He has, in fact, attempted to distill the personal element out of his life completely. Osmond tries to become "convention itself" through strict adherence to a list of "traditions" which, for him, constitute "the aristocratic life" (PL 354). He has little regard for anyone, except insofar as he can use them; and, among the few persons who touch his life, his wife and daughter best illustrate Osmond's tendency to petty tyranny. They are, to him, "pretty pieces of property" (PL 355) for display, like little ceramic figures perpetually modeling submissive familial roles, as a tribute to his judgment and force of character.

As a thinker, Gilbert Osmond seems to have more solid credentials. Isabel is deeply impressed by Osmond's "intelligence" (PL 357) from the moment of their first meeting. Even Ralph, to whom Osmond is anathema, gives the man



credit for a "taste" which permits him to "judge and measure, approve and condemn" (PL 286). He has carefully studied and compiled an agenda for approved behavior by aristocrats. Yet, in spite of his monomaniacal "ideal" of behavioral perfection, Osmond's mental exertions produce only a dead "thing of forms, a conscious, calculated attitude" (PL 354) which impels him to manipulate people rather than to know them. Similarly, for all his cold conceit--a sense of supereminence which relishes "the stupidity, the depravity, the ignorance" (PL 353) of the rest of mankind--Isabel discovers that Osmond lives "not to enlighten or convert or redeem" the vulgar world, "but to extract from it some recognition of [his] own superiority" (PL 353). His professed "indifference" (PL 354) to the rest of mankind only obtains insofar as their welfare is concerned; he needs the degradation and the obeisance of Man in order to prove his own importance.

Ironically, Osmond's consummate self-devotion has left him without self-awareness. He cannot consult himself and attain thereby some healthy sense of worth and freedom from external opinion because the glance inward might expose some chink and raze the myth of infallibility. He pays homage to a "theory" which severs him emotionally from other, more "worthless" men, yet demands their attention because he cannot risk attending to himself. He must, therefore, resort to an imposition of will. Like a cloistered Machiavelli, Osmond--whose disdain for his

wife's occasional promptings of conscience (PL 355) reflects that sixteenth century political realist's opinion that "none come out of servitude except the unfaithful and the bold,"<sup>1</sup>--elects "to use force" in order to have his way. He resorts to collusion and deceit to win his wife, and employs insult and extortion in a sleazy attempt to arrange a marriage with an English lord for his ingenuous daughter.

Osmond's tyranny is petty because his nature is trivial; the source of his insignificance lies in the narrowness of his vision. His "beautiful mind" (PL 353) is, as Isabel finally attests, more constricted than and inferior to Ralph's (PL 357); and, if she had had sufficient immodesty to draw the conclusion, even to her own. Osmond lacks what Ralph has in abundance, and what Isabel finally attains: the "generosity" to allow others the totality of their existence. Ralph and Isabel, "whose study of her fellow creatures had been her constant passion" (PL 354), wish to perceive others in the complex wholeness of their being, while Osmond only wishes to know enough to abase them and bend them to his will. For example, he knows how to use the threat of removal to a convent to insure Pansy's obedience (PL 435), and he thinks he understands Isabel well enough to blackmail her into connivance in his scheme to ensnare Lord Warburton. Osmond suffers from the

<sup>1</sup>Niccolò Machiavelli, "The History of Florence," as quoted by Lionell Rubinoff, The Pornography of Power, 2nd ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), p. 116.

spiritual equivalent of tunnel-vision. His thought is as dexterous as, but no more profound than, that of an actor who has scrupulously memorized a showy, shallow part and desires that everyone rave about the technical integrity of his performance.

Osmond has virtually no intuition, as Jung defines it. The employment of this faculty is contingent upon the breadth and precision of the consciousness; for one cannot prognosticate from what one does not know, or knows only fragmentarily. Osmond, as we have seen, is aware only of his system, and can forecast only those conditions upon which it is based: namely, that all other men will remain eternally vulgar in relation to his unique supremacy of taste. This nullity of intuition best depicts the consequences of failure in all four spheres of awareness. Osmond has abdicated his status as living creature (which, by definition, implies dependency and a constant struggle for improvement) for the purpose of making himself and his daughter over into works of art (PL 434) in flesh and blood--pretty to look at, perhaps, but forever fixed and, as formal entities, essentially lifeless.

This quality of deliberate lifelessness in Osmond is symptomatic of his deficiency in a final, and most individualizing, prerequisite to understanding. The blueprint of learning in its various aspects--the mechanics, the directions and the levels of thought--would not be complete, even

in the simplified pattern set forth here, should the intention of the knower be left unattended. Kant notes that an element of "receptivity" is necessary in the subject in order to "make knowledge possible."<sup>1</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a student of Kant, expands upon this observation in his Biographia Literaria where he discovers a duality of will in the attentive mind. One must develop intense concentration, he suggests, as well as receptivity in order to expand one's understanding:

Most of my readers will have observed a small water insect on the surface of rivulets which throws a cinque-spotted shadow fringed with prismatic colours on the sunny bottom of the brook; and will have noticed how the little animal wins its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary fulcrum for a further propulsion. This is no unapt emblem of the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking. There are evidently two powers at work which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive.<sup>2</sup>

The "intermediate faculty" mentioned by Coleridge is the "imagination." His special and famous conception of this power is relevant to this study and must be discussed briefly in order that it may be assimilated. Gilbert Osmond, meanwhile, may be examined concurrently with, and in light of, this added insight. As we have seen, this "sterile

<sup>1</sup>Kant, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, (1817); rpt., ed. and intro. George Watson (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1965), p. 72.

dillettante" is untouched by the mixed adventures of his fellow humans. He bars the door to social perception by placing himself above the need for association or counsel. Thus his penetration into and participation with other forms of life atrophies.

The capacity, withered in Osmond, which initially bridges the gulf between man and man before speech or physical motion ensue, is the imagination. In practice, this faculty begins to approximate the conditions of the perceived with the perceiver; begins, tentatively, to place the self in the other's shoes. This is one application, to be more exact, of Coleridge's "secondary imagination" which "co-exists with the conscious will."<sup>1</sup> Unlike his postulation of the "primary imagination," which is an almost mystical force as "a repetition in the finite mode of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM,"<sup>2</sup> the secondary "echo" of this power "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create."<sup>3</sup> The primary faculty applies in all intelligences as a preternatural sustenance for a reflexive activity. It corresponds to the fundamental process of association in the mind whereby sensory data automatically images or conceptualizes objective reality. The primary imagination, as a power analogous to the life force, also supplies, in a way as obscure as the intentions of a deity,

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

the potential for all expansion of consciousness. The secondary imagination, however, like the symbol-making capacity, is somewhat subject to "voluntary controul."<sup>1</sup> We can educate it and direct it and thus, by choice, extend awareness.

The volitional aspect of imagination has very significant repercussions in the fiction of Henry James. In the first place, provided it can be shown that Jamesian characters, all or part of them, elect to learn, it may be said that Jamesian fiction contains an element of activism. The history of Isabel Archer, or Lambert Strether, or Milly Theale, is a quest insofar as they or their fellow characters choose to and do attain new knowledge which produces an alteration in their internal make-up. The works of James thereby diverge from naturalistic fiction in which the struggles of the human element are to little or no avail. In The Octopus by Frank Norris, for example, the war between the railroad magnates and the wheat farmers produces no ultimate victory for either camp of "human insects," but only a pattern for continual death and degradation. Forces, economic and technological, govern the affairs of men. At the novel's conclusion, only the fields of wheat remain standing; but, by this time, the grain is more than a symbol for the staff of life, the "nourisher of nations." It is also a fatal symbol for the

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

fuel which will sustain "the human swarm"<sup>1</sup> through the ever-repeating, mindless cycles of annihilation.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the quest theme, the literature of James cannot be classified with the more or less static fiction wherein characters remain what they are when introduced and whose adventures, related in chronological procession, do not alter them inwardly but provide only a change of venue. Dickens' Dombey and Son, while an excellent novel, is peopled by figures who remain good, evil, or indifferent. They are characters whose lives are described from without in terms of what happens to them, as in an historical account, rather than in terms of what happens within them because of the choices they make. Paul Dombey, the elder, is stern and cruel throughout the book. His conversion to meekness and quiet affection in the last chapter, supposedly the result of "the wreck of his fortunes" and a "care and suffering"<sup>2</sup> which are flatly related rather than depicted, is merely a sop to a middle-class public who demand a happy ending. This is not to say that this, or any work by Dickens is inferior; it only suggests that James, insofar as his characters manifest a will to expand imaginatively their fund of knowledge, was after a different

<sup>1</sup>Frank Norris, The Octopus, (1901); rpt. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1958), p. 351.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son, (1848); rpt. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1950), p. 825.

reality and a different method in which to cast it.

Secondly, the possession of knowledge and the assignment of moral responsibility have long been associated.

Aristotle, in the Nicomachean Ethics asserts that "we are in control of our actions from beginning to end, insofar as we know the particular circumstances surrounding them."<sup>1</sup> A person who knowingly commits an act which he considers immoral is, therefore, evil according to his own standards. Obviously, the question of whose character is flawed by, according to the philosopher's standards, "stinginess," "vanity," "apathy," "self-indulgence"<sup>2</sup> and the like. However comprehensive and valid Aristotle's ethical system seems to a given reader, for this discussion the essential fact lies in his distinction between the person who chooses evil, whom we shall call villainous, and the person whose nature is flawed, thereby rendering him offensive rather than strictly immoral.

With specific regard to Henry James, his literary creations and the question of ethics which arises with the theme of volition in his work, a few fundamental assertions must be made. To begin with, I will attempt to allow the

<sup>1</sup>Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1962), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 83, 93, and 100.



creator to judge his creatures according to his own standards. Since James delineated no elaborate moral code and was averse to judgmental statements in the texts of his works,<sup>1</sup> much of his position will be predicated on inference from the treatment he gives certain figures in his novels and stories.

Luckily, few of these subjective limitations apply in the present case, for James left little doubt where he stood on the matter of extensive knowledge and a full consciousness. In an essay entitled "Is There Life After Death?" James makes the following statement: "Living, or feeling one's exquisite curiosity about the universe fed and fed, is being rewarded and rewarded. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Henry James strongly recommended the "accumulation" of the "treasure of consciousness"<sup>3</sup> and, to him, an increase in knowledge was, generally speaking, a positive good. Yet, he was also very much aware that "there are so many different experiences of

<sup>1</sup>James believed that, in fiction, one should arrange for "the presented occasion to tell all its story itself." He was adverse to "discursive" insertions by the omniscient narrator because, to his mind, they produced "an excess of analysis" and destroyed the illusion of life. The quotes in this footnote are taken, respectively, from a review of "George Eliot's Middlemarch" and James's "Preface to The Awkward Age." Both are reprinted in The Future of the Novel, a collection of "Essays on the Art of Fiction" by Henry James, ed. and intro. Leon Edel (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), pp. 63 and 81.

<sup>2</sup>Henry James, "Is There Life After Death," 1910; rpt. in The James Family: A Group Biography, ed. and critical commentaries by F. O. Matthiessen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 610.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 611.

consciousness possible," and that among these are "dreadful things" which not only produce a "negative" attitude but even, in extreme cases, the will "to lay down the burden of being."<sup>1</sup> James's preferences among the possible avenues for thought, those which he regarded as "creative,"<sup>2</sup> must wait until later for definition. For now, it is enough to say that James's ethical principles are seldom given didactically, either in his creative or critical writings, and never ossify into systematic dogma. Similarly, almost all of his main characters, those who are neither "headlong fools" (AN 67) nor mere "vehicles" (AN 54) for plot, are too fully realized, inwardly, in their desires and motivations, to personify a single moral stance.

Yet, if James largely avoids Aristotle's first category of evil in men who demoniacally chose to live in vice, the second category, those who harm themselves and do harm to others through flawed characters, is well represented in his pages. When human volition is coupled with learning potential, the will to see becomes a symptom of moral courage and a tool for the modification or cure of those shortcomings which beset the individual. Protagonists such as Isabel Archer, Milly Theale, Fleda Vetch and Maggie Verver evince, as shall be shown, such courage; and they discover, in their pursuit of a creative understanding of themselves

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 612.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

and their respective worlds, cures appropriate to their various ills.

There exists another large group of characters in James which, collectively, wills not to see. Each member has his own reason, his own defect of character, which impels his wish for partial or selective blindness. Merton Densher, for example, luxuriates in his passion for Kate Croy and desires, in fear of losing her, not to investigate too closely the baseness he suspects lurking in Kate's plans for Milly Theale. Similarly, Fanny Assingham, in The Golden Bowl, is joyfully willing to arrange everyone's life until ugly results begin to attend her meddling efforts. At that point she refuses to acknowledge the fruit of her endeavors and attempts to run away, leaving her victims to cope as best they can with misfortunes Fanny refuses to admit she has helped create. These and other examples, notably those provided by the nameless narrator of The Sacred Fount and, to a lesser degree, by Lambert Strether in The Ambassadors, will be more fully considered in subsequent chapters; yet their central flaw can be described at this point. Unlike another series of actors in James's many dramas--Kate Croy, Charlotte Stant, the Princess Casamassima and Christopher Newman are among them--who cannot see due to some void in their upbringing and their understanding, the willfully blind have an adequate awareness and an advanced moral sense. They are essentially

culpable for their moral cowardice, which allows them, against their own instincts, to co-operate in the evil schemes fabricated by their amoral neighbors. These people, by denying their instincts and affronting their own better judgment, suffer most of all the Jamesian characters. For that reason, while they are more offensive than his "responsible agents" (AN 116), they are also more pitiable.

There exists a third classification of wrongdoing in James which involves neither the knowingly evil character nor the special category of knowing agent who wishes to evade his own cognizance. This third group are the morally ignorant--the amoral, rather than the immoral. Furthermore, these are of two kinds: the hopelessly stupid and insensitive, like Mona Brigstock in The Spoils of Poynton or Mr. Tristram in The American; and the otherwise able and intelligent who, like Gilbert Osmond, simply cannot envision what harmful effects their actions may have on the lives of others. This failure of empathy, whether because the amoral nature is too absorbed by itself to be conscious of others or because its concept of moral duty is woefully superficial and impersonal, is due to a failure of imagination. In time, many instances of these categories will be illustrated in action; but for now, there is offered in The Portrait one strong illustration of such failure.

Long before Gilbert Osmond's negative features are exposed in detail, the reader's suspicions are aroused by the ambivalence in the deft phrase which characterizes him

as a "fine gold coin" (PL 194). Obviously this simile could turn, depending upon the evolution of his character, either upon his inner worth and refinement or, as happens to be the case, upon the reader's gradual realization that the properties of old money are not exactly admirable when assumed by humans. When the image surfaces again late in the novel, after the reader has become quite familiar with Osmond's selfishness, the earlier ambiguity of the phrase has completely disappeared. The opening of chapter 51 finds him "copying" a drawing of "an antique coin" from a volume of colored plates (PL 436). Osmond is characteristically himself in this activity. Sitting amidst his "fixities," his carefully laid-out desk and a neat "pile of books" (PL 436), Osmond, magnifying glass in hand, methodically approximates the impeccable roundness of "the delicate, finely-tinted disk" (PL 436 and 437). As if framed in a painting, he is represented here in all his avidities and all his procedures. His fascination with the coin exposes the avarice hidden beneath his pretensions to cultivation and his alleged reverence for antiquity. His fastidious manners and his lip service to noble traditions are reflected in the rarity of the coin and in the meticulous care he devotes to tracing it. Furthermore, as Isabel interrupts his work with the news of her intended visit to Ralph, who is dying, Osmond's response ("he is nothing to us," PL 438) implies that the inanimate nature of the coin

is also of major significance as a reflection of the man's arid soul. Against the background of Osmond's cynical scheme to use Warburton's affection for Isabel and her sense of duty as a wife and mother in order to marry his daughter well, and in view of the fact that this arrangement involved a mocking dismissal of Pansy's affection for another man, Osmond's obsession with valuable dead things may be seen to imply his indifference to the living. Similarly, the fact that he "copies" the coin, rather than devising a design for himself, intimates, especially when coupled with his earlier admission that he has "no talents" (PL 223), a decided want of innovation. Indeed, Osmond's attitudes have left him bereft of that power of creative combination which Coleridge called the "secondary imagination." He can exercise only the inferior faculty of "fancy," which cannot make discoveries and insights out of newly gathered experience, and "has no other counters to play with but fixities and definites."<sup>1</sup>

While Osmond plays the role he has composed for himself, aping the "forms" of what he imagines to be an aristocratic mien, collecting the studied trappings of a taste which his books have described as refined; and manufacturing, mote by mote, a fancied identity to replace the one (lacking "genius" and without "natural indifference") he was brought

<sup>1</sup>Coleridge, p. 167.

up in (PL 223), Isabel supplies with her own imagination "the human element" which seems to be "wanting" in his life (PL 223). Later, again through the use of her imaginative penetration into her husband's character, Isabel discovers that his indifference to others, which she could not at first accept, is the cornerstone of his artificial soul. Osmond never reverts to the period in his past which predates his conversion to the principle of personal superiority (based on nothing else) for the very good reason that he wishes to bury his former, real self in order to safeguard his illusion. He has devised a formula of dead objects--the outward form of a gentleman's manners, the proper surroundings in books, paintings and "lounging" furniture (PL 192), and a collection of "correct" (PL 254) opinions--in order to appear cultivated. He does not learn or re-create; he only uses whatever seems necessary--money and position and those people who have those commodities to bestow--in an attempt to extort a little of that homage which attends the three personages in all the world in whom he has some interest (the interest inspired solely by "envy"): "the Emperor of Russia," "the Sultan of Turkey," and "the Pope of Rome" (PL 223).

Osmond has a severely flawed nature, but he does not commit evil intentionally. Left only with his fancy to help him putter around among his approved possessions and fixed attitudes, he has no longer the means to a new interpretation

of himself and his predicament. Self-imprisoned by the loss of vision into self and others, he belongs with those who, as Father Zossima depicts them in The Brothers Karamazov, have created hell on earth in "the suffering of being unable to love".<sup>1</sup>

Isabel Archer and Ralph Touchett offer a marked contrast to Osmond's exclusivity. These two young cousins, for all their faults, are eager to gain an expanding awareness of themselves and their fellow men. Although given to the habit of "judging too quickly" (PL 94) and, at first, "very liable to the sin of self-esteem" (PL 53), Isabel has had from her initial appearance in the novel a "determination to see, to try, to know" (PL 54). She has "a great deal of imagination" (PL 158) with which to delve into the causes of her mistakes and to gradually eradicate them. Ralph, too, has a viable imagination (PL 158) which, when combined with his native generosity and active mind (PL 43), helps him obliterate the traces of self-pity that issue from his frail health. He manages to gain a great consolation from "the sensation of life" and, before his death, the knowledge that his adored Isabel loves him like "a brother" (PL 471).

As Ralph and Isabel unite in sympathy near the novel's end, she and her husband become more and more

<sup>1</sup>Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, (1880); rev. and trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Random House, n.d.), p. 387.



estranged. Possibly most effective in rendering the gulf which has opened between them is the previously alluded to scene in which Isabel, against Osmond's express wishes, announces that she has decided to visit Ralph before he dies. Osmond, cold and pompous, forbids the journey with a veiled threat of possible divorce or separation (PL 438), and then sententiously utters a platitude: "I think we should accept the consequences of our actions . . ." (PL 438). This is easy for Osmond to say, for he is ill-natured and, more importantly, resolved, under all circumstances, "never to put himself the least in the wrong" (PL 350 and 393). Osmond, by his own definition, cannot make an error; Isabel, on the other hand, has his presence as her husband to assure her of her own fallibility. She must follow the dictates of her own conscience which, in turn, are directed by the strength of her affections. Isabel agrees with Osmond's tenet, but she raises it from dry, empty formality into the living realm of affirmative choice when she decides to return to Rome, after Ralph's death, and pick up the thread of her life rather than stay in England or escape with Casper Goodwood. This choice, which involves an accommodation of many of the painful facts of life--private aches and the sense of a friend's treachery--which she had earlier striven to ignore (PL 171), demands a process of maturation. The chief agent of this process is her capacity to penetrate to the incentives that lie beneath forms of conduct. Later in this

chapter, this transformation via imaginative growth will be outlined in detail, but first the Doyle/James motif must be resumed in order to compare and contrast one last pair of characters.

Sherlock Holmes and Isabel Archer are the leading figures in the short story and novel which have thus far undergone a tandem analysis. Once these two have been thrown into opposite relief, the inspection of the primary casts from "The Hound" and The Portrait will be completed. In accordance with the pattern established thus far, attention will first be given to Doyle's creation. Sherlock Holmes is essentially summed up, once for all, by Dr. Watson's description of him in an early episode as "a calculating machine" (H 96). Moreover, the curiosity which feeds this walking computer runs in only one vein. His researches and studies, as far flung as "abstruse chemical analysis" (H 130) and the religions indigenous to India (H 127), have the same common denominator: they are all directed to the solving of crime and the detection of criminals. This first great specialist within his profession, a man who "cannot live without brainwork" (H 39) of a singular sort, has one unwavering aspiration. He wishes to elevate criminology from a hit-or-miss proposition to the status of a science. Except for a few idiosyncrasies such as his proficiency on the violin (H 22) or his addiction to cocaine (H 99), Holmes remains largely satisfied, and stratified, within

the attempt to apply empirical logic to his craft. Overall, his interests and his personality are sorely limited.

Isabel, to the contrary, has no enormous capacity in any field. Her faculties constitute "a fine organization." She is "intelligent," but her powers of deduction are not sufficient to win reknown throughout a nation, as are Holmes'. She is merely, as James put it, "one of millions of presumptuous girls" (AN 48) whose history is replete with the inconsistency and emotionality (AN 54) which underscored Sherlock Holmes's famous "aversion to women" (H 435). Indeed, James seems almost as unimpressed by her as the eminent detective would have been had her shadow flitted through Doyle's pages, for, according to her creator, the interest Isabel excites is attributable more to her story, the "ado organized" about her, than to any fascination inherent in her character (AN 48).

If Isabel, however, is less imposing on the surface than the resolute and logical Holmes, her quest requires something more than any key--buried beneath mounds of facts--to a brain twister. Her struggle is, as Dorothy Van Ghent puts it, "a campaign to live" through "the development of the subtlest and most varied consciousness."<sup>1</sup> Holmes is

<sup>1</sup>Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Portrait of a Lady," from The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1953); rpt. in Naomi Lebowitz, ed., Discussions of Henry James (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1962), pp. 49-60.

conscious of many things, but they can, as has been observed, all be filed under the same heading. For all her early text-book morality, romanticism (PL 270), and youthful impatience with "complications" (PL 246), Isabel comes to growth in many dimensions. Perhaps she is most unlike Holmes in being "human-hearted" (PL 324). This virtue, combined with her alert mind and a "nobleness of imagination" (PL 53) which helps her participate in other states of being, give her the tools and the disposition to gently scan the motives of the soul, her own and others', in "each chord its various tone,/ Each spring its various bias."<sup>1</sup>

Since the wellspring of her life is to touch the lives of others, Isabel has been already much discussed in those contexts where the other inhabitants of her story were presented. What remains to be said on her behalf will be left for the next, and final section of this chapter. Having paired off and examined all the central figures from the story by Doyle and the novel by James, one comparison has yet to be drawn.

As one of the premises of this paper it was suggested that the detective story, typified by the efforts of Conan Doyle, presented many sources of concrete evidence to its central figure or chief investigator. An analogous experience

<sup>1</sup>Robert Burns, "Address to the Unco Guid, or the Rigidly Righteous," 1787; rpt., Louis I. Bredvold, Alan D. McKillop and Lois Whitney, eds. Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose (New York: The Ronald Press, 1956), p. 954.

of such a physical clue or clues lies at the very core of the resolution of the quest narrative in both "The Hound" and The Portrait, so that a comparative analysis of these instances will serve to clarify further the scope of intent and the underlying substance in both stories. All the scenes in the ensuing discussion involve the quality of art appreciation as that prowess is made manifest in the reactions of the two kinds of detectives: Sherlock Holmes and Isabel Archer.

In Chapter 13 of The Hound of the Baskervilles, Holmes is thoroughly intrigued by a series of portraits which line the walls in one room of Baskerville Hall. These are, as he surmises, renderings of assorted members of the Baskerville family. Ever cautious, even beyond obvious need, the sleuth claims the initial interest of a "connoisseur" (H 749) of painting. Yet, the fascination these pictures hold for him is not elicited by artistry but by the seemingly "meek mannered" countenance of one subject in particular: that of the infamous Hugo who, as Holmes eventually discloses, is the exact double (sans beard) of the equally malevolent Stapleton. Thus the alert criminologist is supplied with a "missing link" of hard circumstantial evidence to support his growing suspicions that the naturalist is the culprit. In this pictorial corroboration of "a throwback, which appears to be both physical and spiritual" (H 750). Holmes, in the guise of art critic,

discovers a clue which surpasses all coincidence, arranges his accumulated evidence in a neat dovetail and reveals the inimitable mastermind, once again, in the obsession that routs all other inclinations in his heart. Holmes may have a mild interest in painting, for he recognizes (or pretends to recognize) two of the artists responsible for the specimens in the gallery as Kneller and Reynolds. His connoisseurship, however, is primarily a guise designed to draw pertinent information from his host and cover, until an appropriate time for disclosure arrives, the full import of his interest in the picture. In the meantime, Hugo's portrait is viewed merely in the single dimension of its usefulness in tracking reprobates.

In a comparable episode from James's work, Chapter 5 of The Portrait of a Lady, finds Isabel getting her initiation into European painting as she strolls with Ralph through the oaken-paneled gallery of Gardencourt. Unlike Holmes, she seems arrested by the paintings for their own sake. She has, Ralph notices, a "natural taste" for works of art, but she also embodies a willfulness that will brook no "suggestion" (PL 49) on the part of any other who proposes to instruct or direct that taste. Isabel is, in fact, much more captivated by the possibilities of gothic romance which the old mansion suggests than by the rows of pictures she inspects by candlelight. Turning from the gallery after a complacent and rather cursory examination, she dismisses the

topic of painting and excitedly inquires after the family ghost. For all her "little exclamations and murmurs" (PL 49) of aesthetic gratification, Ralph's young cousin is soon satisfied that she has plumbed the depths of the pictures and considers them worth little additional thought, and certainly worth no advice as to their origins and histories from her informed host. Isabel is, as we have seen, full of herself and noble theories of behavior at this time. Art, at this early stage of her international adventure, seems a frivolous, if mildly amusing, topic when compared with "her visions of a completed consciousness" which "concerned themselves largely with moral images" (PL 94). Isabel is, after all, the "innocent and dogmatic" (PL 54) girl who rejects Madame Merle's one viable word of counsel: one must, the more worldly lady asserts, regard "the whole envelope of circumstances" and "things" (PL 172 and 173) that surround one, for "they are all expressive."

While Merle and Gilbert Osmond are overly concerned with surfaces and inclined to deceptive arrangements of them, Isabel's obstinate insistence that "nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me" (PL 173) leaves her vulnerable to her "friends'" duplicity and liable to error among the many useful truths that appearances convey. In accordance with her maintenance of "a little moral account book--with columns unerringly ruled and a sharp steel clasp" (PL 174), Isabel opts for autonomy of interpretation on her narrow terms. In spite of a vivid but superficial curiosity

about the exotic forms and customs in her new milieu, Isabel is predominantly engrossed by her own composition. In the moralistic nimbus of her naive self-regard she finds abhorrent to her above all things the "chance of inflicting a sensible injury upon another person" (PL 53). The key word in her position is "sensible," for her horror is not of the hurt inflicted, but of the inner stain incurred. Such a transgression, regardless what becomes of the unfortunate victim, would be "the worst thing that could happen to her" (PL 53). In her egocentric desire to judge entirely for herself, Isabel is, at first, as unmoved by the general welfare of others as she is by the art objects she so casually peruses.

This adolescent selfishness in a rather headstrong girl who had "seen very little of the evil in the world" (PL 53), and who would sooner forget what little she had seen (PL 51), begins to dissipate as Isabel gains experience. A second salient encounter with art occurs for her in Rome, among "a great company of Greek sculptures" (PL 251) near the Capitol building, where she sits in solitude and responds to their beauty and to a vague aura of life which seems to emanate from them (PL 252). No longer so precipitous in judgment, due to her increasingly complex private life, Isabel, in presence of these objects, exercises her new virtues of contemplation and patience in forming opinions of them. Just prior to this, she had accepted Osmond's proposal of marriage, and, for all her joy in anticipation of that "great



deed" (PL 240), her "consciousness" is "more mixed" than ever before (PL 240). In addition to the bestowal of her favor, she has recently rejected two other proposals; one by Casper Goodwood, a zealous suitor whom she knew in America, and the other by Lord Warburton, a genial English peer and political reformer. Oppressed by Warburton's prominence in public affairs and by Goodwood's singleminded aggressiveness in business and courtship, Isabel prefers an "indolent man" (PL 169) whose unqualified virtues exist only in her romanticizing mind. In the crush of all this decision-making she simply has not had as much time to concentrate upon herself. Moreover, her egoism is somewhat dispelled as her "too-ingenuous theories of conduct"--the antipodes of an idealistic desire to "see life" (PL 158) without being too heavily "touched" by it and the simultaneous urge to sacrifice herself to "some private duty" (PL 291)--begin to break asunder in contradiction.

Not as yet deeply troubled, but only very confused by the pressure of her personal life, Isabel, as she sits among the statues, is affected by her last encounter with the crestfallen Warburton. As she speaks with him, during her tour of Rome with Osmond, she feels, this time, no resurgence of her former "enjoyment . . . in the exercise of power" (PL 143) over disappointed suitors. Rather, she senses that she has deeply "hurt" the aristocrat (PL 251) and, in contradistinction to her earlier solicitude for her own moral comfort, feels for him, in his pain. Against

this backdrop, and with a similar disposition to let the statues act upon her instead of imposing her interpretations upon them, Isabel, in the gathering force of self-doubt, senses something "mildly human" in the marble figures. In their "noble quietude" and "grace," and in a minute suggestion, conveyed by "absent eyes" and stone lips (PL 252), she senses vague murmurs of consolation, offered but not quite heard. She is somehow mollified by them, yet has not been worn sufficiently by the elements herself to grasp the lessons they teach through their weathered surfaces.

A third aesthetic awakening, near the end of the novel, takes place as Isabel sits amidst the ruins of Rome and distractedly ponders the collapse of all the youthful aspirations in her own life. By this time her marriage has soured, and Ralph is gravely ill. Her once-esteemed husband, and her former confidant, Serena Merle, are both pressing her, with vulgar avidity, to wheedle Warburton, via his helpless devotion to Isabel, into a loveless marriage with the pliable Pansy. Gradually, however, she puts herself aside and notices the forms surrounding her. On this occasion she is able to penetrate the surface and decipher the meanings appropriate to her life which lie at the foundations of the crumbling buildings and small deserted church. Once erect, proud and vibrant with life, they still, in a poignant way, bespeak and preserve a timeless celebration of the human effort to build a civilization and express its humanizing faith.

She had long before this taken old Rome into her confidence, for in a world of ruins the ruin of her happiness seems a less unnatural catastrophe. She rested her weariness upon things that had crumbled for centuries and yet still were upright; she dropped her secret sadness into the silence of lonely places, where its very modern quality detached itself and grew objective, so that as she sat in a sun-warmed angle on a winter's day, or stood in a mouldy church to which no one came, she could almost smile at it and think of its smallness. Small it was, in the large Roman record, and her haunting sense of the continuity of the human lot easily carried her from the less to the greater. She has become deeply, tenderly acquainted with Rome; it interfused and moderated her passion. But she had grown to think of it as the place where people had suffered. (PL 423)

The ramifications, implicit and explicit, of Isabel's hardwon receptivity are numerous. To begin with, she has accomplished, in this imaginative transcendence of herself and identification with "the human lot," a constructive perspective from which to view her personal dilemmas against the heroic, yet perishable backdrop of human endeavor. She thereby gains a double infusion of courage and compassion which guides her toward affirmative choice. As an example of her new decisiveness, one need only turn to the final chapter of the novel where, upon her return to England, Isabel is approached once again by the resolute Goodwood who pleads that she escape her disappointments by flying with him into "the very big world . . . which is all before us" (PL 481). After an embrace, during which Isabel experiences the lure of sexual response to this dynamic American businessman in "a kind of rapture, in which she felt herself sink and sink" (PL 481), she breaks free and turns away to

the doors of Gardencourt, sure of "a very straight path before her" (PL 481).

Isabel will return to Rome. In her moment of indecision in Goodwood's arms, she may have been swayed by affection for Pansy, who, upon entering a convent just prior to Isabel's departure for England, had begged her step-mother to "come and see me soon" (PL 453). Isabel has promised that she will return (PL 455); for, unlike Goodwood, who selfishly believes that "we can do absolutely as we please" and acknowledges no tie of affection (PL 481), she has come to recognize and rejoice in the love that binds her to Pansy and Ralph. It is certain, however, that she does respond to the tenet sanctimoniously mouthed by her estranged husband to the effect that "we must accept the consequences of our actions." Isabel, ironically, takes this platitude, so empty at its source, and, as has been said, raises it to the vitality of a living creed. In response to those readers who find in her refusal of Goodwood a frigid denial of sexuality and a life-denying stoicism,<sup>1</sup> it must be

<sup>1</sup>A number of critics express dissatisfaction with the denouement of The Portrait, and the view of Arnold Kettle is typical of these. He finds Isabel's rejection of Goodwood and her return to Rome "the duty of an empty vow, the resignation of the defeated" ["The Portrait of a Lady," An Introduction to the English Novel (London: Hutchinson Publishing, 1953); rpt. in William T. Stafford, ed., Perspectives on James's "The Portrait of a Lady" (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 107.J.

interjected that whatever progress she has made toward awareness has been purchased at the price of facing things exactly as they are. Her passion for Goodwood, who, as a person, she has always found too abrupt (PL 404) and inconsiderate (PL 137), is a confirmation rather than a negation of sexual desire. Escape within the "rushing torrent" of sex (PL 481) might bring oblivion for a time, but, as Isabel knows in her hard-won wisdom, such a limited fashion of self-discovery and expression is, in itself, no more adequate a means to cope with reality and to expose its truths than had been her earlier, narcissistic ethical-husbandry and insistent optimism. She has outgrown both the mindless, magical formula of Dr. Coue<sup>1</sup> and the myth of escape through physical passion.

Weighed against her imaginative participation in the continuity of human struggle and perseverance through the ages, Isabel's own troubles do not now loom overwhelming in her own eyes. Along with her intuition that "life would be her business for a long time to come" and that, in spite of her present difficulties, she "should someday be happy again" (PL 458), co-exists the insight that she must not, in order to continue to mature in the various planes of consciousness, sever her continuity with her own past. Isabel senses that those who flee from their problems learn nothing and

<sup>1</sup>The nineteenth century psychologist's famous theme song is recorded as follows: "Every day in every way, we are getting better and better." Repetition was supposed to bolster the spirit.

that it was "probable that if one were fine one would suffer" (PL 458). Indeed, this realization that the price exacted for increasing awareness often takes the form of suffering--the capacity for being "troubled and affected" growing as the manifold consciousness expands (AN 145)--becomes a major theme which echoes throughout James's novels. The consolation of knowledge, on the other hand, lies in the additional vision available to those "all beset and all perceptive" (AN 62) and also in the added intensity with which subjects are perceived. In the words of Henry James, if "you haven't the root of the matter in you, haven't the sense of life and the penetrating imagination, you are a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured; but . . . if you are so armed you are not really helpless, not without your resource, even before mysteries abysmal" (AN 78).

Isabel's example teaches us that the development of our faculties is its own reward. Misery, the experienced and attentive know, is never wholly avoidable, and we can reasonably expect and demand no favors from life except those which our own efforts at wholeness bring forth. In this regard, Isabel winds up exceptionally blessed. By the conclusion of her recorded history, she has become that rarest of birds, the integrated being. In the terms of the four-fold standard set forth earlier, she has enriched herself in feeling--caring for others as fervently as she cares for herself; thought--coming to articulate grips with

the ruin of her marriage; sensation--discovering her sexuality and her sensitivity to objects of art; and intuition--becoming able to trace into the future the consequences of her present actions. Moreover, her concessions to the lessons of experience and her courage to persevere in seeking them describe not only the conditions upon which her achievement is founded, but also throw into relief the powers and opportunities neglected by her peremptory husband. If Isabel pays the price of susceptibility to pain and envisions the greater threat of failure in light of goals more demanding than Osmond's, she also increases thereby the avenues to success and sharpens her sense of joy. Osmond attains the security of immobility, but forfeits his life.

In her moment of epiphany among the ruins, Isabel exemplifies one of the most successful examples in James's fiction of a balance struck between external reality and its reflection in an internal grasp. In this ostensibly ordinary girl the principal components of the imagination, defined by James in two parts as "the spiritual and the aesthetic vision" (AN 346), expand apace and finally converge in an insight wherein the precepts taught by the study of human nature and an appreciation of art objects are fused in the catalytic overtones of old Roman architecture. Isabel's response to these ruins completes her gradual initiation into the aesthetic sense. Yet, at the

same time, it also incorporates her most incisive and inclusive moral perception. The immortal spirit of man as well as his touching limitations are revealed to her in the crumbling remnants of a great effort at temporal and universal order. Man, in the aggregate, is imperishable, and even the doomed individual can take heart in contributing a small portion to the ongoing record. Two strong reinforcements for humane self-direction, inspiration and sympathy, are thus instilled in Isabel as she finally manages to reconcile the sphere of appearances with the region of underlying meaning.

Isabel has learned to take each person as an individual and to permit each thing its independent existence. For all its delay and opportunity for error, and in spite of the universal human tendency to abandon diligence, this disposition to judge only on the most exhaustive evidence and only after a sincere attempt to juxtapose surface and substance (beginning, of course, with one's own organism), is infinitely preferable to any of the various short-cuts to knowledge. A few of these detours have already been examined in conjunction with Jung's presentation of the four avenues to learning; but two such evasive time-savers are James's special province, for they correspond to one-legged distortions of the bipedal imagination.

There are a number of characters drawn by James who, although not stupid, persist in floating on the surface of



things. This insouciant detention within the boundaries of aestheticism and sensation is evidenced in a variety of ways. For example, Mrs. Gareth, from The Spoils of Poynton, has an affection for her pretty furniture which becomes so consuming that it crowds out most of her concern for the welfare of her son. Roderick Hudson, in the novel by the same name, is an artist whose aesthetic sense dominates his being. When told by a friend that his self-centeredness and insensitivity to the plights of others have intensified their pain, Hudson can only reply that he "must have appeared simply hideous."<sup>1</sup> Appearances are all his reality. His distress is not for the grief he has caused, but for a lack of charm in the image he presents. The unnamed narrator of The Sacred Fount loves to assume any ludicrous supposition as an explanation of human behavior and build fanciful castles of thought in the air. He prefers these to the more mundane realities which attend his human guinea pigs in their actual fundaments. Finally, Ida Farange of What Maisie Knew lives to gratify her sensual whims, and will cast aside anything--husbands, lovers and daughters--that interferes with her carnal pursuits. There are other members of this cast of the half-blind, but these few are perhaps sufficient to represent all these who, in their diverse obsessions with surface, miss "what is beneath it and what throbs and gleams through" (AN 278).

<sup>1</sup>Roderick Hudson (1875; rpt. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 340.

Another form of superficiality is engendered by the dogmatic attempt to impose a static and repressive formula for correct behavior upon the whole of humanity. Lionel Rubinoff, in his book, The Pornography of Power, traces this urge to "classify" others and "subsume them under an abstract general rule"<sup>1</sup> to a determination to deal with others without having to think. Closed systems of thought and imperious ideologies help us escape responsibility for ourselves and the threat of coming to grips with other people, other ideas. To reduce a man to a generality or an ideological phrase destroys his individuality. Such a reduced being is, as Rubinoff insists, no longer a man, but "a mere object."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, we who dogmatically deprive others of their wholeness become objects ourselves because we refuse to exercise those properties of thought, feeling and imagination which make us human. This is not a question of intent, but of the inescapable logic which compels us to behave according to the quality of our understanding.

Dogmatism is the moral bent of the imagination without the corrective half, the aesthetic bent, which celebrates the recognition of diversity. Members of this censorious colony of visual cripples also abound in James. Mrs. Newsome never appears in The Ambassadors, but the

<sup>1</sup>Lionel Rubinoff, The Pornography of Power, 2nd ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), p. 170.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

pervasive influence of her "cold thought"<sup>1</sup> is keenly felt by Strether and the reader alike. She is the disembodied spirit of what James, in his notebooks, called "the New England conscience."<sup>2</sup> This relentless faculty, in the name of "daily tasks" and "Duty,"<sup>3</sup> sacrifices all "sense of sensations, passions, impulses, pleasures" as wanton vices. Moreover, all who engage in such sinfulness are beyond redemption according to the Newsome system. Henrietta Stackpole, in her chauvinism, also belongs to the dogmatic group, although her jingoistic bark is far worse than her bite. Julia Dallow, of The Tragic Muse, feels that partisan politics offers the only avenue to a worthwhile profession and Paul Muniment, in The Princess Casamassima, believes that bloody revolution and the rule of anarchists hold the cure to all social inequities. Many other figures from this camp of the half-imaginative might be listed as well; but the point is made, I think, that those who reside exclusively at one pole of the imagination--that of mere aspect or ideology, appearance or meaning--sever themselves from their fellow men and from the chance for wholeness in themselves. It is the duty and hope of the "braver imagination" (AN 203) to walk the thin line between the harsh flights of dogmatism and

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, The Ambassadors (1903; rpt. New York: The New American Library, Signet Books, 1960), p. 321.

<sup>2</sup>Henry James, The Notebooks of Henry James, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 227.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

the flashing colors and lights that bedazzle the senses.

Much more remains to be said about the imagination and James's conception of that power and its constituent parts. The next chapter, for example, will focus upon the particular bent of James's own aesthetic awareness and the part it played in his formulation of a theory of art and his understanding of the multilateral nature of man.

For the moment, however, a brief iteration of Conan Doyle-Henry James motif is in order so that any loose threads of argument on that head may be gathered together in one last statement. Claims of analogous character development in the literary efforts of both authors have been made on the basis of a stepwise revelation of significant thematic matter which, in turn, is accomplished via use of unreliable human testimony and a welter of physical clues. Suspense is thus built by both writers as the resolutions of their stories are withheld. Even the solutions to the two works emphasized in this study seem, at first glance, very similar. In "The Hound," as in most of his adventures, Sherlock Holmes triumphantly concludes his quest with an accurate deduction of a criminal's identity. Likewise, or seemingly, so, Isabel Archer's history terminates soon after she discovers the boundaries of her own identity. Yet, as has been intimated all along, within this apparent similarity lie many contrasts. Merely to name and assign deeds to an individual is hardly the same as working through to a deep understanding of one's self and one's human environment.

The detective stories of Conan Doyle have more in common, ontologically, with problems in traditional physics than with the fiction of Henry James. Like the physics student, Sherlock Holmes tries to devise a formula in one dimension from a number of related material objects. People, in effect, are little more than objects to Holmes, for he is interested in them only insofar as they exhibit relevance to a given crime. By the same token, that crime becomes the principle which aligns all his encounters with men and material. He has trained himself to seek the single property of pertinence to a particular case, much as the physicist sorts from his indexed information all the facts pertinent to, as one example, the rate of acceleration of falling bodies. The account of Isabel's search for identity, however, traverses many levels of being, and the works of Henry James are not escapades to beguile the mind and time but experiments in a literature so serious that, to borrow a phrase from George Santayana, they "focus our experience and give some scope and depth to feeling."<sup>1</sup> Subsequent chapters of this investigation, beginning with a probe into the Jamesian concept of art, will continue to display and define the fruits of that seriousness.

<sup>1</sup>George Santayana, Three Philosophical Poets (1910; rpt. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1938), p. 20.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE "IDEA OF THE PICTURE" AND THE IMPULSE TO ART IN THE FICTION OF HENRY JAMES<sup>1</sup>

In her treatise, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James, Dorothea Krook delineates two modes of artistic generation and procedure which, in her view, underscore and typify the poetry of William Wordsworth, on one hand, and the achievement in prose of Henry James on the other. According to Professor Krook, the Wordsworthian method, involving "the stripping principle," attempts to arrive at and depict the "fundamental passions" of man by peeling away "the external appurtenances of civilization."<sup>2</sup> Thus exhibited in his simplest state, surrounded by scenes of quiescent nature and divested of worrisome self-consciousness, Homo sapiens can be, as this theory supposes, plumbed in his most universal ideas and feelings.

While this approach, in Krook's view, is valid and productive, she sees Henry James as having attacked his literary task from a point of view diametrically opposed to, yet quite as viable as Wordsworth's. James's "loaded or

<sup>1</sup>James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup>Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James, 2nd ed. (London: The Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 20.

weighed down" principle of artistry tries to reflect "cultivates tastes and habits" in a much decorated, an "encumbered and encrusted,"<sup>1</sup> objective world. Man, in this scheme, must be endowed with "delicate perceptions" and "gifts of insight and powers of discrimination . . . far exceeding the reach of men in real life"<sup>2</sup> in order to cope with so richly complex a human and physical order. Many members of James's cast of characters possess, therefore, a consciousness challenged and created by a multifarious material environment and a subtle, elusive human atmosphere which, in concert, produce a correspondingly complicated image of self. For Krook, the imaginative realm of James, "overlaid with its beauty and civility,"<sup>3</sup> makes for an intensity of moral discovery and aesthetic delight not available in the works of the famous Romantic poet. In Krook's opinion, James sacrifices the clarity of Wordsworthian postulations, which emerge from the human isolation of a single, humble cottage against a barren landscape; but he more than compensates with a fuller, more perplexing and, consequently, more life-like rendition of man in society and among the beckoning treasures of art.

Putting aside any question of invidious comparison between or any ranking of the two writers, these observations, it seems to me, are both enlightening and valid, so far as

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

they go and they go both too far and not far enough. In the first place, Professor Krook, in her concentration upon methodology, only begins, indirectly, to formulate the philosophical and experiential origins of the "Jamesian condition," or the elemental assumptions upon which James's art is built. In the second place, her emphasis upon divergent formulas for literary creation obscures the fact that James, although he had numerous ideas on the subject, steadfastly refused to develop or work from systematic theories.

For Henry James, the world was a veritable cornucopia of sights, gestures and inflections--which required internal gyrations of heart and mind as well as the close attention of the eye--not because an intricate law of composition dictated such elaboration, but because his particular cast of thought and temperament made a multiform fictional world inevitable. James was directed in his art according to the subjective visions and assimilated values which shaped his personality. Thus, in order to comprehend the "principles" of his fiction it will be necessary to arrive at some understanding of who, on his own terms, James was in himself. The expression "on his terms" is used because he resented those--critics and busybodies alike--who proposed to interpret an author's work entirely by appealing to and invading his private life and character.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See p. 51, and footnote 1, p. 54. Also see The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 198.



The study at hand, therefore, intends to assay only those facets of Henry James, the man, which, by James's own admission, were seminal or contributive to the formation of the artist. James was not shy--as many of his letters, essays and his autobiographical volumes show--about exposing the influences which led to the growth of his "artistic imagination"<sup>1</sup> and his craft. It is from these self-admissions, consulted and carefully sorted out, that a backdrop for his substantive vision into human nature will be culled. In other words, this critic intends to explore, within the perspective of James's work, the manners in which that writer derived knowledge, the sort of knowledge it was, and the ways in which his own quest for awareness impinges upon the various comparable expeditions for knowledge set out upon by his dramatis personae. This study proposes to let James tell most of his own story of the germinating author himself and to draw parallels from within his novels and stories which illustrate not only how much of James is in his work, but how many and what kinds of ideas inhere in both. Since James was reluctant, for many reasons,<sup>2</sup> to

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, "Is There Life After Death?" (1910); rpt. in The James Family: A Group Biography, p. 613.

<sup>2</sup>James found repugnant, from the days of boyhood, "the conscious propriety . . . and flagrant morality" which finds its way into literature and often issues from the pulpit. He also disapproved of a tendency in certain novelists, notably Anthony Trollope, to deflate their illusions of reality (in their books) by incessant auctorial interruptions. See The

intrude upon his fictional narrative with naked authorial opinions or omniscient directives, it is useful to reconstruct the influences that moved and shaped him as a critic and as an historian, in order that we may discover any correlations that exist between himself and his creatures-- correlations which would help in understanding the full thematic implications of creatures who are like their creator at least in the fact that the best of them choose to live out their beliefs rather than codify them.

In his first autobiographical book, A Small Boy and Others, Henry James repeatedly depicts himself as an habitual onlooker, "occupied with the sense and image of it all," rather than as a person "actually immersed . . . in everything and everyone."<sup>1</sup> He had neither the ingenuity at play nor the assertiveness he so admired in his older brother William, (AB 78) nor had he the gift "for making friends" (AB 119) in the ready manner of his younger brother, Garth Wilkinson James, to whom the family gave the pet name "Wilky." Finding other children, especially boys, "difficult to play with" (AB 148), James was often forced to entertain himself. He never found this difficult, however,

Autobiography of Henry James, p. 38. Also, in his "Preface to the Ambassadors" (AN 321), James criticizes "the inserted block of merely referential narrative" which had become "custom" for writers of fiction in his day. Also see The Future of the Novel, p. 248.

<sup>1</sup>James, Autobiography, p. 248.

for he was equipped with an uncommon appetite for visual experience which he slaked by wandering through the shop-lined streets of New York (AB 41), looking long hours into "picture books" (AB 56), and attending the amateurish "old American stage" (AB 60).

James's natural reticence and consequent preference for the role of observer continued throughout his life, as many of the vignettes from his life story attest. There is the memory, for example, of a private school named Richard Pulling's Academy--one of many briefly attended institutions of dubious instructional value which contributed to James's unorthodox education--where a certain Mr. Jenks presided as headmaster. This fellow, an indifferent teacher, but an appreciable "civiliser" as "one of the last of the last of the whackers" (AB 120), never had occasion to discipline the small, quiet James boy whose presence in class was "merely contemplative" (AB 120). A similar attitude is conveyed a few years later by an episode described in Notes of A Son and Brother when Henry, having tagged along with William to an art lesson conducted by the painter William Hunt, sits in an isolated corner, far from "the earnest workers" (AB 284), and scratches out poor copies of the pictures hanging on the studio walls. In the same vein, letters written in Henry's young manhood from Italy and France complain, in the former

instance, of having "been nearly a year in Italy" while having "hardly spoken to an Italian creature,"<sup>1</sup> and, in the latter case, of encountering extreme difficulty, while in Paris, in forming "any relations of permanent value."<sup>2</sup>

Finally, an anecdote related by Edmund Gosse--an eminent translator of foreign literature into English, and James's friend--extends our subject's habit of equanimous deference into middle age. Gosse describes a group of six companions, painters and writers, who vacationed "in boisterous intimacy" for two months in the English countryside. They worked, debated and played together "in towering spirits."<sup>3</sup> Henry James came for a few days' visit and was "the only sedate one" there. Gosse remembers him as "serious, mildly avuncular" and even "grave."<sup>4</sup> However, while James was retiring, and content to stay on the periphery of all the spirited activity, he seemed to enjoy himself. He was "benign, indulgent . . . very happy and unupbraiding."<sup>5</sup> One incident in particular emerges from this note of reminiscence as an illustration both of James's healthy acceptance of his own nature and his ability to appreciate, without envy, those who relished exploits more rambunctious than the long, rambling walks he prescribed for himself.

<sup>1</sup>James, The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

The company, replete with lady guests, decided, one morning in late summer, to go boating on a nearby river. In Gosse's words, they

. . . spent the long rollicking day in rowing down the winding Avon from Evesham to Pershore. There was much "singing in the English boat," as Marvell says, and Edwin Abbey "obliged" profusely on the banjo. Henry James I can still see sitting like a beneficent deity, a sort of bearded Buddha, at the prow, manifestly a little afraid that some of us would tumble into the river.<sup>1</sup>

Henry James seems not to have been frustrated by his habit of holding back. He was not, as he recalls his childhood, competitive (AB 119), and he can not remember ever "feeling jealous of children of spirit" (AB 101). If he was "shy" (AB 240), he was, nevertheless, charged with an active curiosity. His earliest visits to Rome and Florence were filled, not with intimate conversations, but with eager sight-seeing forays which gave "glimpses of everything . . . all the Piazzas and ruins and monuments."<sup>2</sup> If, in his formative years, he gathered most of his many impressions alone, he soon discovered the resource of "living by imagination and thereby finding that company, in countless different forms, could only swarm about me." He found he had the faculty of "seeing further into the figureable world" than most people, and that this capability "made company of persons and places, objects

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>2</sup>James, The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, pp. 25-26.

and subjects alike" (AB 492) without demanding any open confrontation between himself and the forms, material and human, that directed his interest.

Thus, we begin to see that James was disposed to approach life indirectly--through objects of art, examples of architecture (AB 191), and human exteriors as "models of type and tone" (AB 229)--and inwardly through the agency of an active imagination. Deprived of any consistency or direction in his formal education due to the somewhat whimsical notions of his father,<sup>1</sup> Henry James, fils, instructed himself largely by following his own instincts. His primary instinct, as he readily admits, was to follow the evidence of his eyes and record "elements of spectacle" and "all appearance almost glutinously thick" (AB 563). Yet, for James, "pictorial" perception was not merely a fleeting reflection of the surface of reality; it also provided a means for entry into the other abiding interest in his life, "the dramatic, the social, the effectively human aspect" (AB 482). Having, from his youth, a lasting aversion to

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, senior, is colorfully depicted in his son's autobiographical volumes, even to his eccentric ideas about education. He had "no scheme . . . mapped out" for his children's instruction, but simply trusted, for the most part, to the meritorious effect of variety on their lives and the inspirations of the moment. "Everything that happened to us," Henry, junior, recalls, "we were to convert" to "success" or "lack of success." The important thing was that "life be interesting." The four James boys attended, separately, a curious mixture of academic institutions. Young Henry, for example, was apprenticed, informally, to a merchant, went to a school of technology and to law school--to mention only those he showed absolutely no aptitude for. The Autobiography of Henry James, pp. 241, 248.

"the dry or abstract proposition" (AB 350), and recognizing that he was, in his improvised curriculum, "after persons so much more than anything else" (AB 338), James sought--in architecture, painting, mannerisms, social usages, dress and even in the subtle modulations and ellipses of human dialogue--a fundamental understanding of the nature of man even as he simultaneously acquired a deep familiarity with the forms in which mankind expressed itself.

Desiring to become "philosopher" enough to "know man as well as men,"<sup>1</sup> and determined not to perpetuate the practice of "sentimental or conventional interference"<sup>2</sup> whereby the writers of fiction, by inserting their own opinions into the text, both disturb verisimilitude and, paradoxically, curtail the universality of the imaginative world they project, James intended, as far as possible, "to make the presented occasion tell all its story itself" and "remain shut up in its own presence" (AN). In order to accomplish this he must draw verbal "pictures" which convey human feelings (AB 395) as well as "the manner and . . . the tone of things." He must likewise design dramatic scenes in which, as in life, the unsaid conveys as many ideas as the uttered; in short, he must construct a realm of "penetrabilities"

<sup>1</sup>James, The Future of the Novel: Essays on the Art of Fiction, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 340.

(AB 571) rather than a tissue of sermons or abstract discourses.

Although many implications can be drawn at this point from the Jamesian position just outlined, three are of special significance to this study. First, the essential distinctions between the stances of Wordsworth and James are clarified. For both authors, human nature is a topic of pivotal concern. However, insofar as Wordsworth concentrated upon Man, the collective being he chose to portray his specimen against a backdrop of Nature and society simplified, in order, as he states in the Preface to his Lyrical Ballads, to lay bare "our elementary feelings" and allow them to be "more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated."<sup>1</sup> Henry James, on the other hand, tried to supply an undercurrent of selected meanings for a carefully tailored plot while also providing the illusion of a bustling, bursting reality in an abundance of sights, sounds and human conflicts. He tried to have it both ways--celebrating surface and substance as well; this paper will be focused not only on the degree of success he attained in this attempted mixture, but also upon a detailed exploration into the distinctive nature of Jamesian appearances and meanings. In his love of "variety," that "sweet idea" and "contradiction of any dialectic"

<sup>1</sup>William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads" (1800); rpt. in ed. David Perkins, English Romantic Writers (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), p. 321.



(AB 334), and his disapproval of the formula, or the "well-tried receipt" for churning out "successive portraits,"<sup>1</sup> James attempted to depict--at the risk of his reader's uncertainty about the lessons he was gently trying to teach--men caught up in a web of relationships with their whole environment. Secondly, this brief review of James's outlook helps affirm the fact that his fiction was the result of an evolution of method reinforced by experience rather than reliance upon any arcane and precarious theory.

Lastly, and most importantly, two quintessential tangents of Jamesian thought, his deep "regard for appearances"<sup>2</sup> and his equal interest in "touching human values and faint, sweet scents of character" (AB 30), have been introduced and will be, as they are traced further within the author's works, of increasing usefulness as we try to penetrate to the philosophy James was determined to achieve. Before considerations of theme arrest the full attention of this study, however, a few final comments must be made concerning the writer's life and character.

While James was no academician or ideologue, he must, on the other hand, be distinguished from those other instinctive artists and individualistic thinkers who, like Walt Whitman, got their impressions of humanity at first hand and

<sup>1</sup>The James Family, p. 526.

<sup>2</sup>James, The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 18.

at close quarters. Although he was, as we have seen, benignant but retiring in his relations with others, Henry James describes, in his second autobiographical volume, an instance in which he did expend himself in an overt gesture of greeting and sympathy for a group of total strangers. During the Civil War, James, a strong supporter of the Union--he had two younger brothers invested in its cause and was stung by the knowledge that infirm health<sup>1</sup> kept him from participation--departed Boston for Rhode Island and the encampment of two regiments of invalid and convalescent troops. Bearing "responsive sympathy" and "pecuniary solace" (AB 424), he was received with kindness, but still felt out of place among the young soldiers who assumed, for him, the forms of "amusing figures" from a "confused romance." James was well aware, as he recalled this episode years later, of Whitman's subsequent visits in Army camps and the essential difference in attitude between himself and the exuberant poet toward the combatants. In James's view, the "good Walt" was chiefly "stirred . . . by his participating in the common Americanism of his hospital friends" while he--a frequent visitor to Europe who found in one misplaced year at Harvard law school his first experience ever of "matters normally, entirely, consistently American" (AB 418)--reacted in accordance with "another

<sup>1</sup>He mentions having had some trouble with his back (AB 441). (Also see The James Family, p. 247).

logic." (AB 425) For all his good will and compassion, these men, rustic and rough, remained an unknown quantity to James, and he had to "reach across to their . . . side of the matter" as much as was possible.

Significantly, the most poignant moment of the whole adventure, the "spring of the whole reference" for James (AB 426) occurred during his return trip, by steamboat, to Boston. In the rawness of the evening, sitting on the open deck against a bulwark for support in his exhaustion and in the driving wind, he was able to come to sort out the lessons of his journey. Here, alone, he could ruminate upon his outing and bring its salient points into "the lucid charm" of "consciousness." Here, too, he could undergo the physical discomfort which gave him a pleasant illusion of sharing in the wounded soldiers' "common fact of endurance." The "truths" inherent in this apperception of his trip were "intensely individual and supersubtle" (AB 426) insofar as they required reflective solitude and a measure of personal sacrifice in order to emerge. It was imperative for James in this instance and, as shall be shown, for all his central characters in their respective trials on the paths to wider awarenesses, "to be able, under stress, to be separate, to be solus, to know at need . . . some independent consciousness." (AN 252)

Different indeed, as James suggests, was Whitman's digestion of camp life. Standing in very little need of

solitary consultation with his private scheme of things, the ebullient poet, by his own account, wandered about from tent to tent, in high satisfaction, singing hymns with the convalescents, washing and dressing their wounds and arguing over Biblical passages with them.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as Whitman attests:

In camp and everywhere I was in the habit of reading or giving recitations to the men. They were very fond of it, and liked declamatory poetic pieces. We would gather in a large group by ourselves after supper, and spend the time in such readings or in talking. . . .<sup>2</sup>

For this outgoing nature and inflammatory imagination, the occasion itself provided sufficient warrant for celebration in song and story. Communion, not the step back into particularity, was the catalyst which stirred Whitman's artistry.

The threads of James's enthusiasm, however, are somewhat more knotted and take additional space to unravel. As a student of life, James was a fervent believer in the achievement of a stable identity through "complete freedom of mind"<sup>3</sup> and a desire to be "as solid and dense and fixed"<sup>4</sup> as possible. Yet, he was also determined to "lend myself to . . . sociability"<sup>5</sup> and sound "the whole tone of society" in

<sup>1</sup>Walt Whitman, Walt Whitman's Civil War, ed. Walter Lowenfels (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>3</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I, p. 388.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>5</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 21.

its "remarkable cluster of private decencies and . . . traditions." (AB 71) In delineating James's preferences and past one arrives, in fact, at a representative scenario for his literature: the relatively inexperienced person, with a strong inclination to internalize experience and with a broad arsenal of mental and emotional resources--who loves to gaze at the concrete, external manifestations of an unfamiliar culture, but who realizes, that surfaces, as well as manners and customs, are "charged with meaning . . . on the human side" (AB 188)--typifies the Jamesian "register" as well as reapplies what has been said of James. The summation also signals the kinds of treasure the author sought and the kinds his creatures continue to seek in book after book.

In order to understand this search for consciousness, however, we must become familiar with the fields of investigation which James made available to his subjects. Prominent among these are the two indispensable items, art objects and other people, which so held James's attention and which formed, as we shall see, the two major loci of the Jamesian imagination. For now, and for the remainder of this chapter, this evaluation will focus upon "the love of beauty, of art, the aesthetic view of life"<sup>1</sup> as it coalesced in the author's mind and as he used it in his work.

In his critical Prefaces, Henry James insists that "Art deals with what we see" and "must first contribute . . .

<sup>1</sup>The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 157.

that ingredient." (AN 312) What is more, the visual appealed to him most, especially during the first half of his career, in the form of painting. In many contexts and through many slight modifications of expression he readily admits that he "revels in the picture." (AN 139) Even when, in later years, he felt his former "keen love of . . . the picturesque"<sup>1</sup> fade away, he remained excited about "the idea of a picture"<sup>2</sup> in his work. The word painting and the metaphorical incorporation of objects within the text of a novel was useful for producing "fusions and interrelations" between segments of plot and theme, and for "framing and encircling . . . every part of my stuff in every other."<sup>3</sup> James, as many critics have noted,<sup>4</sup> even developed a specialized language by borrowing terms from the pictorial arts; calling, as representative examples among many, the novelist "a painter of the social picture"<sup>5</sup> and referring to

<sup>1</sup>The James Family, p. 321.

<sup>2</sup>The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I, p. 347.

<sup>4</sup>Of these, two of the most informative are Viola Hopkins Winner and F. O. Matthiessen. See Professor Winner's article "Pictorialism in Henry James's Theory of the Novel" [Criticism, 9, No. 1 (Winter 1967), 11-21].

Also see Matthiessen's "Henry James's Portrait of the Artist." This serves as the introduction to two volumes of stories, edited and introduced by Matthiessen, entitled Stories of Writers and Artists (New York: New Directions Press, n.d.).

<sup>5</sup>The Future of the Novel, p. 269.

the novel variously as "a canvas" and as "the painted picture of life." (AN 105)

Besides drawing from the plastic arts, James also took phrases from his other love from childhood, the drama. Under the influence of the stage, he used the word "dramatist" interchangeably with "novelist," and often expounded upon a given novel and its episodes in the guise of a "drama" and "scenes."<sup>1</sup> This specialized vocabulary highlights, as Viola Hopkins Winner has observed,<sup>2</sup> James's expediency and fluidity as a critic, for it provides an adequate terminology for an art form which had not one and it shows a wide knowledge of the arts as a whole.<sup>3</sup> It also constitutes a lasting tribute to those youthful proclivities, grown to maturation, for observing physical reality in those forms framed and heightened by artistry, "the picture" and "the representative design." (AB 149)

The "appeal" James felt in "exhibitions and illustrations," stage and painting, was to carry over "all his days" and permeate his fiction as a viable means to and symbol for consciousness. Both of the modes mentioned by James in his personal response to "the complex of picture and drama"

<sup>1</sup>See The Art of the Novel, pp. 10, 55, 67, 251, 320.

<sup>2</sup>Winner, pp. 19-21.

<sup>3</sup>For all his delight in visual and verbal art forms, James had no ear for music. In a letter to the composer, George Henschel, he admitted, "I am unlyrical, unmusical, . . ." See The Letters of Henry James, Vol. 1, p. 230.

(A B 104) are worthy of separate analysis as seminal influences in the evolution of his creative intelligence.

For want of space, however, and because it is not necessary to this study, James's abortive career as a playwright will be left unexamined in order that his earliest and strongest passion, that for the picture, may be featured in these pages.

Very likely the best early example of this delight in visualization, coupled with an incipient impulse to compose via the imaginative fusion of theme and surface, is provided as James recalls a visit to France shortly after his twelfth birthday. Standing near a roadside inn, just outside Lyons, young Henry was struck by the tumbled remnants of a castle in the distance. Looking closer, he spied a "peasant in sabots" laboring in the field adjacent to the majestic ruin. At once, in an "ecstatic vision," the mental confluence of these forms, architectural and human, gave meaning to his observation. He had achieved an imaginative "synthesis" whereby an old woman and the abandoned tower, according to the measure of a small boy, represented all James yet knew of Europe. This wedded image, humanity conjoined with artifact, remained in James's memory as a portent of his subsequent profession as a man of "analytical mind" and his method as a writer. This incident made, as he puts it, "a bridge over to more things than I then knew." (A B 161) Most importantly, for this investigation, it supplies an



unequivocal example of the art object as metaphor, a device which James employed often, and with increasing sophistication, as his craft expanded. Before a more exacting look is given to the art object in his fiction, however, a few final remarks must be placed concerning James's qualifications as a connoisseur.

While his affection for the visual arts was not confined to painting, James concentrated on that medium very heavily in a number of essays and critiques which spanned a period of more than thirty years.<sup>1</sup> If, as Adeline Tintner suggests, these evaluations reveal a taste in pictures that was "liable to error in a field he never really understood,"<sup>2</sup> James's unvarying insight into the common ground of all worthwhile artistry is far from trivial or unsupported by the testimony of other artists, even those who express themselves on canvas and in stone. His contention that "the artist we value most is the artist who tells us most about human life"<sup>3</sup> is, in the first place, not surprising in view of what

<sup>1</sup>Many of these essays have been collected and reprinted in James's single volume, entitled The Painter's Eye: Notes and Essays on the Pictorial Arts, ed. and intro. John L. Sweeney (London: Rupert Hart-Davis Company, 1956).

<sup>2</sup>Adeline Tintner, "The Museum World of Henry James," PMLA, 61 (1946), 239-251; rpt. in Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 148.

<sup>3</sup>The Painter's Eye, p. 185.

has been said about his primary interests. In the second place, his views are seconded by Picasso and Henry Moore.<sup>1</sup> James's taste may have been untutored, liable to subjective whims about favorite painters and, as Tintner puts it, his preferences may have been for "the story implied in the choice of subject matter" rather than "the formal relations" set up between the elements of a work of visual art.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, he may have been prone to a naive insistence upon a literal translation of the human matter he intuited at the core of the plastic arts--which would explain his belief that "there is no greater work of art than the portrait"<sup>3</sup>--but he never felt that he was mistaken about the primary power of painting and sculpture. It was of their essence to record and educate the observer to "the subtler qualities of feeling" and "reflection."<sup>4</sup> Such goals are also not incompatible with the art of fiction, a fact Henry James was well aware of and which convinced him that the painter's craft could, in many propitious

<sup>1</sup>Picasso avers that, in judging paintings, one ought to try "to sense the inner life of the man who painted them." Moore discloses that each of his works "takes on in my mind a human . . . character and personality." The first quote is taken from "Conversation with Picasso" by Christian Zervos. The second is from an essay authored by Moore, "Notes on Sculpture." Both articles were reprinted in The Creative Process: A Symposium, ed., Brewster Ghiselin (New York: Mentor Books, 1952), pp. 60-77.

<sup>2</sup>Tintner, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup>The Painter's Eye, p. 227.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 213, 227.

ways, be incorporated in his own.

Much could be said about the artists and pictures that James knew and those that pleased him most, but such a review lies beyond the scope of this presentation. Generally speaking, his tastes in the realm of the visual arts, beyond an almost universal fondness for cathedrals and the remnants of old castles, were highly individualistic and not ascribable to any particular school or style. Those who wish to pursue this topic further can find admirable guidance in Professor Winner's volume, Henry James and the Visual Arts, which treats of James's affinities in this area, and attempts to trace the art objects described in his fiction back to their original inspirations in actual canvasses.<sup>1</sup> This paper, however, is more interested in the philosophy which underlies James's use of such objects and, notwithstanding the quality of his aesthetic judgment in the realm of the visual arts, in exposing whatever thematic functions they perform in their literary contexts. As an initial step in this direction, a short synopsis of the contagious potency of things to exude meanings is given in The American Scene--a book on the topology as well as the manners and customs of his native land, revisited after a residency of more than twenty years in England--wherein James stresses the

<sup>1</sup>See Viola Hopkins Winner, Henry James and the Visual Arts (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1970).

importance of "the cluster of appearances" for anyone who would be "a painter of life."<sup>1</sup>

To be at all critically, or . . . analytically minded . . . is to be subject to the superstition that objects and places, coherently grouped, disposed for human use and addressed to it, must have a sense of their own, a mystic meaning proper to themselves to give out, that is, to the participant at once so interested and so detached as to be moved to a report of the matter.<sup>2</sup>

In what ways, then, did James contrive to portray "the look of things . . . that conveys their meaning"<sup>3</sup> in numerous well-wrought, descriptive deposits of stone and canvas, pottery and mortar, throughout his creative work? To begin with, the written representation of an object of visual art acts as a focal point in the Jamesian story or novel. It frames episodes in which an onlooker or onlookers are frozen in attention to the object and moved to responses commensurate with their level of articulation and with the quality and variety of their interests. Thus a dramatic tension is often set up in James's fiction between person and thing, subject and object, or between two or more subjects with the tangible object present as pretext or a bone of contention.

James did not invent descriptive passages, of course, but he realized their many purposes more completely than many

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, The American Scene (1907); rpt., intro. Irving Howe (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), p. 273.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>The Future of the Novel, p. 14.

another author. He saw, for example, that a method of composition by pictures reflected in the minds of his conscious centers--sometimes called a "camera-eye technique"<sup>1</sup> by his critics--provided an "economy" and directness of statement seldom managed by sections of dialogue and/or authorial musings. (AN 84) As a case in point, the helpless bewilderment of Christopher Newman, in the opening chapter of The American, among masterpieces by Raphael, Titian and Rubens in the Louvre, is conveyed as readily by his own behavior and by the amusing picture of his dilemma as by the flat assertions that art was "a new kind of arithmetic" for him and that he was "baffled by the aesthetic question."<sup>2</sup> Newman's baffled retreat to the copyists and the familiar base of concrete human contact, as well as his inability to distinguish between Mademoiselle Noemie's daubs and the work of masters,<sup>3</sup> combine to raise a lasting image of a tall man with furrowed brow who, guidebook in hand, wanders hopelessly amid rows of colorful bulletins printed in an unknown tongue. The

<sup>1</sup>Leon Edel is one of those who discusses the "camera" effect which results when James mirrors concrete items in the transparent, but untranslated, consciousness of his leading characters, or "registers". This analogy appears in Edel's The Modern Psychological Novel (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), pp. 21-22. Matthiessen, in The James Family, also calls attention to Henry James's "camera-eye" (p. 656).

<sup>2</sup>Henry James, The American (1877; rpt., Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co, Riverside Edition, 1962), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

descriptive passages do not replace, but simply and economically reinforce the messages lodged in the conversations between characters and the narrator's remarks.

Similarly, the progressive stages of aesthetic illumination achieved by Isabel Archer (discussed in some detail in the preceding chapter) do not supplant, but effectually support the awakenings she undergoes in the moral sphere and the penetrations she makes into the psychology of others. While Isabel's increasing artistic appreciation coincides quite neatly with her expanding awareness of human nature, it takes much less to represent--some eight pages for three key instances--than do her interior monologues on the motives of her husband and her companions. Her successive stages of immersion into paintings, statuary and buildings would mean much less and, in fact, could never occur without the simultaneous history of her developing insight into her multifaceted self and the other people who influence her life. Yet, the scenes of aesthetic awareness do provide a sort of pictorial guide to the whole of her conscious growth. Objects of art assist her mind and the reader's much as the little dioramas, to weld a sacred simile to a profane subject, on the walls of Catholic churches help the congregation visualize and concentrate upon the stations of the cross. The picture, James seems to imply by this use of it, is worth a good many words if, and only if, it is conjoined with a narrative which anchors it in a meaningful human context.

Implicit in this analysis of James's novelistic economy via descriptive passages, but worthy of consideration in its own right, is the ancillary power of the verbal picture to reveal and advance character. Henry James had a favorite term, "penetralia,"<sup>1</sup> which designated those objects that, when apprehended by a rapt observer, acted upon the imagination and took on meanings referable to the private mind of the percipient. In themselves, artifacts may be "penetrable" through historical connotations, utilitarian properties (such as those possessed by a post office or a potato peeler), or characteristic of decoration and design, such as symmetry and perspective. In their effect upon others, the reaction James gauged so precisely, they arrest the self-forgetful observer and lay him exposed, in the quality and breadth of his taste, to any second pair of eyes whose owner is privy to the thoughts and feelings of the original viewer. In this manner, supplying the art object as elicitor and then homing in upon the response excited in his characters, James deftly, and indirectly, models many of his creatures in the full regalia of their inner resources.

In the sixth chapter of Roderick Hudson, for example, a small group of people, mostly artists, have drawn together to evaluate the statue lately executed by the novel's title character. This oversized conception of Adam elicits many

<sup>1</sup>The American Scene, p. 256.

comments--as many points of view, in fact, as there are persons in the room. Augusta Blanchard, a painter who specializes in rendering flowers, and who is competent with backs, but "a little weak in faces," (RH-90) has nothing of moment to say. She offers a "pedantic" opinion on the origin of "pagan mythology" (RH 92) and suggests, sonorously, but with little idea how much effort and skill it takes to work in a medium and with a range so much more exacting than her own, that Hudson dash off a figure of Judas as a "companion piece" to the young sculptor's projected Christ.

Another painter, a modest water-colorist named Singleton, embraces an attitude at the opposite extreme from Augusta's aloofness. He is overwhelmed by Roderick's precocious talent and restless personality. Singleton listens to the sculptor with awe, "as if Phoebus Apollo had been talking," and can mutter only the submissive opinion that the young man's "statues are beautiful." (RH 90)

The dialectic of genuine criticism arises, however, in the squaring-off between young Hudson, the holder of art as a glorious ideal, and Gloriani, a worldly, clever and commercially successful sculptor who represents a "very corrupt . . . school" (RH 88) and espouses a deeply cynical philosophy of art and man. The looming marble figure of the Original Man, the pretext for struggle between these



divergent points of view, embodies Roderick's first, and only really successful, attempt at capturing "perfect beauty." (RH 95) The American artist's objective is to express "the human type in superhuman purity" (RH 95), and to fashion "divine forms" while never making, or even contemplating "anything ugly." (RH 94) This willful and untenable concept of art as a region fit only for the "perfect spirit"--which constitutes a kind of ironic unconscious censorship of his craft by the maker--is counterbalanced by the somewhat pathological viewpoint of Gloriani, who rejoices in the ugly and "the grotesque." (RH 89)

The elder artist's work is "florid and meretricious" and intended to pander to and "amuse" those "knowing" patrons who share his demeaning estimate of human nature. (RH 88) Although Gloriani's opinions are as cynical as Roderick's are unrealistic and restrictive, the older man has one decided advantage over the younger, for he has disciplined himself to persevere in his work through every climate of temperament and even in the absence of any inspiration. Moreover, Gloriani's expectations of himself and his twisted subjects cannot be disappointed because they are so low to begin with. Hudson, though, as Gloriani foresees, will not be able to maintain for long his illusions of ideal beauty and incorruptible human models. Soon he must "burn out" (RH 99), in the cynic's words, because his "Muse" is wholly

dependent upon a false notion of man and the proper dominion of aesthetic expression. Roderick cannot look to the universal sources of inspiration for the artist, nature and humanity, and still sustain his pretty falsifications and grandiose designs, for the fallibilities of the world and man, their inevitable uglinesses and corruptibility as well as their occasional beauty and nobility, will either teach him his limitations or force him to waste his energies in clinging to an illusion rather than using them in refining his art. Right as he is about Roderick, however, Gloriani is no less doomed as an artist. In fear of being duped, the older sculptor has settled for a mean opinion of his subjects and a faddish style. Roderick Hudson, for his part, in his abhorrence of the flawed and the ordinary, deprives himself of the means and the opportunity to mature. He will not permit himself to examine and portray man in his totality because, in his avid search for dimples, he will not accept the occasional wart.

Thus, in this early novel by James, we are shown how art objects can be used to exhibit identifying traits of character. James does not restrict himself, however, when extracting such responses from his figures, to the somewhat confined case reflected in Roderick Hudson, where all the artifacts are the creations of the declaiming dramatis personae, who are all professional artists. Neither does he limit himself to the drawing-out power of objects whose

origin, with regard to a specific artist, is, as in the cases of the Roman ruins or the ancient statuary which confront Isabel Archer, either withheld by the author or so generic as to be anonymous. Ever so often, James

consults the roll of actual artists and draws forth a name: a famous one, such as Paul Veronese, or a quite obscure one, such as Lambinet.<sup>1</sup> In each of these cases, however, and a great many others, it is not the particular work and its quality in itself that is stressed, but the impressions gathered and disclosed by the reflector who views it. In other words, James rarely imposes omniscient judgment on a work of art or eliciting object; he simply exposes enough of the item to produce a reaction and allows the observer to speak for, and of, himself.

A good example of this procedure is provided by the treatment given Susan Stringham, a somewhat peripheral character in The Wings of the Dove. This composer of gushy, sentimental stories for a number of American magazines finds in the paintings of Veronese a correlative for the romantic ambience, the "high style of grandeur,"<sup>2</sup> which in her view,

<sup>1</sup>According to Matthiessen, Lambinet is "a nearly forgotten painter of scenes along the Seine." This confirmation of the painter's actuality (James sometimes made up the names of the artists he used in his stories) is taken from F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase [2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 35].

<sup>2</sup>Henry James, The Wings of the Dove (1902); rpt., intro. F. W. Dupee (New York: Signet Classics, 1964), p. 260.

should surround her young friend and companion, Milly Theale. For Miss Stringham, the Veronese group portraits of Italian nobility mirror and, in their evidence that a man of genius can be engrossed by deep sentiments about and be moved to a lush rendering of aristocratic life, justify her addiction to a "romantic" view and her wrongheaded attempts to construct a "romantic life" for Milly, her "heroic" princess. (WD 82 and 287) Susan's estimation of her favorite painter, and the lengths to which she goes in order to build parallel scenes of vicarious romance in her own and poor Milly's life, serve to exhibit her inner resolve to "make up . . . in fancy" for many "starved generations of Puritans" (WD 183) in her family tree.

In a somewhat similar, but more expanded case, Lambert Strether, who plays the leading role in The Ambassadors, holds a certain landscape by the French artist Lambinet in reverence as a private symbol for the aesthetic education he once deeply desired but never received. As the reader first encounters him, Strether, the straight-laced editor of an innocuous American literary review, has disembarked in England on his way to France. Once in Paris, he will serve as emissary for a wealthy New England widow, Mrs. Newsome, who has charged him with the duty of prying her son, Chad, away from the lures of the immoral cosmopolitan city. The young man has a position as head of his family's prosperous manufacturing concern awaiting him in his more righteous

native land. Upon his arrival, however, however, Strether soon falls under the heady influence of a culture much devoted to sensory gratification. He recalls his own, long-ago curtailed appetite for pleasure, especially those mild forms which appeal to the eye and the imagination, and finds that he must champion the civilizing air of France instead of the pragmatic shores of America.

To compensate for his missed opportunity to purchase a Lambinet landscape in his youth, and to rectify his capitulation to a society which considers any cultivation of the senses a sin, Strether manufactures an overly-idyllic, chivalric idea of Europe which prompts him to abandon his original mission. He advises Chad to remain where he is. To this provincial, romanticizing man, people must be what they seem, and the decorous behavior of the upper-class Parisian circle into which he falls suggests, to his ingenuous outlook, that an enlightened code, an admixture of humanism and heraldry, must account for what he diagnoses as "high decencies." (Amb 245) Toward the climax of his adventure, after Strether has fought the good fight for his new values and the complicated culture that spawned them, he takes a holiday to the countryside. Flinging away his "high interests" and determined to put aside, for a time, all the strategy occasioned by his campaign to assuage the objections of the Newsomes to France, Strether abandons himself to visual enjoyment. He comes to feel that he has, at last, in the

presence of rolling hills, peasant dwellings and a gently rolling stream, possessed his Lambinet landscape by actually entering its frame. (Amb 331) When a small boat drifts into his view, however, bearing the figures of Chad and Mme. de Vionnet, all Strether's careful calculations about his friends and their respective roles and incentives go awry. He had not made any provision for the intimacy which obviously exists between this pair, and, in his sudden, utter confusion, the reader is reminded that Strether, in his romantic submission to "the spell of the picture" (Amb 331) (as well as his many glorifications of people and places in Paris) was a person for whom "romance could weave itself . . . out of elements mild." (Amb 326) Much remains to be said of this Jamesian comedy, but enough has been supplied, for now, to illustrate, again, how an art object can draw an imaginative person out.

Aside from their use as instruments for economy of presentation, in revelation of character and as graphic reinforcements of plot, art objects have another, chiefly figurative role to play in James's fiction. Henry James had a strong belief that all the arts, in spite of their divergences of media and method, were basically one insofar as they "were illustrative" of "the color, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle."<sup>1</sup> In light of this conviction, his inclusion of

<sup>1</sup>The Future of the Novel, pp. 14, 15.

paintings, bibelots and other and sundry fashionings of human taste and symmetries of thought contributes a thematic superstructure to his work. Art objects are meaningful not only in revealing the inner assets of his registers; they are also, in the broadest sense, meaningful in themselves. They betoken human expertise, the capacity for fine selection and the ability to interpret, and order, the inclusive chaos of reality. The surfaces of paintings, the facades of buildings and the images of poetry, consciously and instinctively wrought, convey what Susanne Langer calls "ideas of feeling"<sup>1</sup>--a visual "language" in which "every line, every sound, every gesture" articulates an emotion or group of human emotions--which communicate in their own sphere, over and above any possible associations with ideas of reason.

In order to read this language where, in James's phrase, "feeling is always meaning," the spectator at the protean exhibition of Art must cultivate his faculties of discrimination; his sensitivity to other emotional states; and his flexibility with regard to disparate points of view. In other words, the art lover is not totally unlike the serious student of life. In fact, the study of art constitutes a special inquiry into human nature, for it helps delineate

<sup>1</sup>Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 39.

the essence of man and equip him with the means to express it. For Henry James who, as has been noted, tended to take his lessons not from the mouth of man but from his handiwork, an education in one or more of the branches of artistry was a prerequisite for a comprehensive view of man in the world. This fact is readily shown in his tendency to speak of "the social question" in terms borrowed from the artist's studio:

. . . the human, the social question (is) always dogging the steps of the . . . contemplative person and making him, before each scene, wish really to get into the picture, to cross, as it were, the threshold of the frame.<sup>1</sup>

The infinite incarnations and subtleties of art comprise one of the very best schools for those who undertake to inventory "immense humanity" and the "myriad forms of reality".<sup>2</sup> James, most notably in the first two-thirds of his writing career, makes repeated use of this hypothesis. He gives examples both of those who, at their unsuspecting peril, ignore art or never become fully aware of its reach, and those who, on the other hand, auspiciously employ their aesthetic sense as an educational aid as well as a vehicle for sheer enjoyment. Objects of art, then, as they occur within a Jamesian text, are, at the most general level, metaphorical guideposts for those who recognize their instructional properties. At the plane of the specific, they are,

<sup>1</sup>The American Scene, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>The Future of the Novel, p. 12.



for those who have witnessed their alchemy, individual lectures on the shades, the tones and the articulation of the human feelings that color perception.

One of the most ingratiating members of that unfortunate tribe who never quite come to terms with art is Christopher Newman, the reformed American businessman who journeys to Europe for the vague purpose of plunging into "the many forms and customs" and deriving, thereby, "the biggest kind of entertainment a man can get." (A 33 and 34) He is, as he attests, certainly "not a fool" (A 32), for he has turned "wash-tubs" (A 97) and a large fund of business acumen into a fortune. But the domain of art remains as much an exotic mystery to him as do the invioluted prejudices which animate Urbain and Mme. de Bellegarde's haughty aversion to him or those which compel his friend Valentin to precipitate a duel over a venal coquette. Newman is a sympathetic character, full of sound common sense and unfaltering good-nature. (A 62) His taste, however, never really transcends his simplistic appetite for quantity--he wants to see "the tallest mountains, and the bluest lakes" (A 24)--just as his insight into people never advances much beyond a casual invocation of the Golden Rule. (A 287 and 62)

One episode in particular from The American helps to illustrate Newman's profound complacency and incompetence in aesthetic matters. In the midst of a jaunt across the Continent, which he takes in order to steep himself

effectively, by leisurely osmosis--he believes that "a man's life should be easy" and that one should never, at any cost, burden oneself with "uncomfortable thoughts" (A 62)--in the decorative marvels of Europe, Newman makes the acquaintance of two men who become, consecutively, his travelling companions. The first of these, an American Unitarian minister named Babcock, takes his doses of art and the larger question of life in general with a seriousness tantamount to moroseness. (A 69) He secretly suspects, moreover, that everything and everybody European has an inescapable tendency to be "unscrupulous and impure." (A 65) Babcock is a moralistic pigeonholer of the first water. He feels compelled to measure every inch of his timid life against inflexible formulae for "the moral life" and "duty" (A 65) and to try and wring from them the absolute "truth about everything." (A 68) He likes the genial Newman, but, after a short time, begins to fear that this wealthy countryman, in his obvious indifference to the categories of evil, might be sadly "irresponsible." (A 71) Deciding that Newman lacks "spiritual starch" (A 66), the little cleric parts company with the amiable, contaminating businessman and returns to Rome to re-evaluate the painter Luini.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Babcock is deeply worried that he may have been, when viewing Luini's works, infected by Newman's easy-going and tolerant nature. Luini is a painter of religious subjects, and the clergyman is dismayed that, prompted by Newman's exclamation that Luini's "genius" is "like a beautiful woman," he may have enlisted an artist among "the first-rank" who does not belong there (Am 68).

At a later stage of the same trip, Newman encounters an English newspaperman who regards him as "too stern a moralist" and a lamentable art critic in view of his disposition to "judge things like a Methodist." (A 74) Characteristically, Newman is puzzled only briefly by these contradictory opinions. He does not bother to consider the irreconcilable backgrounds of his two companions or to reflect that perhaps a grain of truth resides in each of their views. Perhaps he is a trifle too sober for a man without a coherent philosophy, and, at the same time, not serious enough for a man who wishes to improve himself. At any rate, he soon drops the issue altogether in a careless dismissal of "both idiots." (A 74)

Similarly, as an observer of people instead of pictures, he neglects to look behind the lofty manner of the Bellegardes in an attempt to penetrate and understand the underlying layers of tradition. The shrewd Yankee trader is less than astute in the market of human interaction, and neither his instinct for self-preservation nor his curiosity about and respect for the usages and motivations of others is sufficiently strong to make him calculate his own position and nature with respect to the strange beings surrounding him. Unthinkingly, like a big puppy, he rejoices in his love for Claire de Cintre, but he never seriously ponders the glaring differences in their attitudes and environments and the potential hazards to their happiness which these differences present. For instance, when Claire, due to the machinations of her snobbish mother and elder brother, calls

her engagement off, Newman, in mystified anger and pain, oblivious to his betrothed's profound family ties and the convention of sanctuary in the Church, becomes enmeshed in a melodramatic plot to besmirch the Bellegarde name. Urbain and his mother undoubtedly deserve castigation, but Newman betrays an ignorance of this evil pair and of his beloved which amounts to frightful insensitivity. Due to his position as an outsider and, worse, as a somewhat unrefined commoner, his campaign to expose Mme. de Bellegarde and her son to their aristocratic peers as murderers is doomed to failure. More importantly, however, Newman is blithely unaware that his participation in a plot to involve her father in a scandal, plus the humiliation that would accrue to him in such a scheme, would redouble Claire's anguish and impose upon her a penalty far worse than banishment to a convent.

Newman is saved from this fatal faux pas, however, not by any awakening of insight and informed sympathy into and for his friends and enemies, but by the reflex action of his "unregenerate good nature." (A 364) Although not blamable for the perverse beliefs and odious behavior of certain French nobles, Newman, with a greater sense of responsibility and a deeper urge to know, might have avoided his catalytic role in a series of tragedies. His incuriosity about art parallels his hopeless confusion on the social front. Both are reflected in the novel's final pages where a final junket through London, its stately museums and "dingy" streets, is

briefly described. For all his experience of loving and suffering, Newman's taste remains as uneducated as his vision into other people remains perfunctory: "Anything that was enormous" still "found favor with Newman" and his "observation" stays "uninitiated." (A 357) Although he has been through a great deal, little evidence exists to prove that Newman has learned very much besides resignation.

"The Aspern Papers" incorporates another analysis of the inability to delve into the human mainsprings of art and the dire consequences which attend such a failure. The narrator of the story, a votary of the American poet, Jeffrey Aspern, determines, under the guise of an assumed name and the plausible excuse of "having some . . . literary work to do,"<sup>1</sup> to infiltrate the rambling home of an ancient, withdrawn woman, Juliana Bordereau. She had been the "glorious poet's" mistress and she possessed, in fierce privacy, a number of love-letters as keepsakes of that liaison. The narrator wants these letters in order to publish them, and he decides in advance to pay almost any sum, including a sham courtship of the woman's unattractive niece, Miss Tita, to obtain the treasures. He devises a scheme of "obeisance to the old lady" (259), pays an exorbitant price to secure a room

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, "The Aspern Papers" (1888); rpt., intro. Dean Flower, Great Short Works of Henry James (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 226. Subsequent references to the text will be taken from this edition. The appropriate page numbers will be simply enclosed in parentheses.

in her home and, in accordance with his plan, begins to flatter the middle-aged niece.

As he plies his design, the narrator becomes increasingly obsessed by the letters and proportionately indifferent to the welfare of the two women whose home he shares. In his occasional sightseeing walks about Venice, among the "strong effects" of "the basilica of St. Mark" and "the mystery of its mosaical sculpture" (246), he is continually mindful of the letters and the decaying house in which they are secreted. The beauty and religious significance of these scenes affect him, in his monomaniacal attachment, no more than scruples of common decency are aroused in him by his ruthless deception and manipulation of the two ladies. The fact that neither woman is exactly admirable--Juliana has a severe case of avarice while Tita shows some skill at extortion--does little to ameliorate the narrator/pirate's harmful duplicity. He stoops lowest as he rifles through the room of the aged relic and last living link with his "poet of poets" (253) while she, Aspern's "beloved" Juliana, lies near death on a nearby bed. His "love" for Aspern obviously does not encompass much reverence for the poet's feelings or for those whom he once loved. The narrator is, as Juliana gasps when she catches him shuffling through the papers on her desk, a "publishing scoundrel." (286)

There is, all the same, a limit to the scoundrel's fervor and a price he refuses to pay for the cherished

documents. Miss Tita, he finds, has gained control of the letters. Instead of destroying them, as she was bidden by Juliana, she has secured them in a niche of her own provision and, infatuated with the narrator and desperate for affection, she offers them to him in return for a proposal of marriage. The scoundrel cannot swallow this. He discovers that the unhappy prospect of wedding this spinster, a "ridiculous, pathetic, provincial old woman" in his eyes, turns the letters into merely "a bundle of tattered papers." (267) Miss Tita, disheartened by rejection, honors the wish of her aunt and burns the bundle. The narrator, meanwhile, rediscovers doubt in the cold light of his refusal. He finds, after his return to London and after the fright of his close escape has faded, that his "chagrin at the loss of the letters becomes almost intolerable." (301)

Henry James, who hated any "proscriptions of privacy" and waged "a standing quarrel with blundering publicities,"<sup>1</sup> has played, in "The Aspern Papers," upon the masterful irony set up when messages of deep personal affection, which thrive upon privacy and cannot exist without it, are treated with unconscious contempt as articles fit to assuage public curiosity. The callous narrator of the story never reflects that his restless designs abrogate not only the legal rights of the Misses Bordereau, but also those

<sup>1</sup>The American Scene, p. 168.

privileges granted by humane consent and the traditions of genuine civility which permit the "great poet" and any other man a life of his own and a space of privacy to live it in. Instead of being thankful for what Aspern has openly offered of himself, the narrator itches to expose the corners of the poet's life which lie concealed and, thereby, violates the memory of the artist whom he professes to worship. He feels "humbly ashamed" (286) by the cold stare Juliana gives him when she catches him nosing through her papers, but this shock cannot deter his purpose--a purpose engendered by a mind which cannot reach to the human core of any imperishable art, be it the mosaics of St. Mark's or the sonnets of Jeffery Aspern. The publishing scoundrel's treatment of a miniature portrait of Aspern gives us a final indication of his puerility. He has obtained this likeness from Miss Tita with the promise of trying to sell it and returning half of the proceeds to her. Instead, he sends her some money and keeps it himself. It hangs above his desk where he gazes upon it every day, not out of affection or as a stern reminder of his deceptions, but as an admonition of his failure to become the celebrated editor of a volume of previously unpublished letters. (301) He, like Newman, is predisposed to learn very little.

At the opposite pole from these paragons of blindness, in the region where man is gently interpreted and, in



particular ways, educated by art, stands Isabel Archer, whose history of advancing aesthetic imagination and inter-dependent, expanding senses of self and community has already been outlined at some length. Another member of this enlightened company of those who are susceptible to the lessons of art is Hyacinth Robinson, the ill-fated hero of The Princess Casamassima. A brief disclosure of a single segment from that novel is all that is required to give a counterbalance to the episodes of aesthetic ignorance discussed above. Robinson, a poor bookbinder and self-proclaimed political activist, has, in spite of this unlikely profile, a deep "faculty of appreciation" for "the beauty of the world." (AN 72) At one point in his brief life, he avails himself of the opportunity to journey from his native London across the Channel to France. There, among the silent, but splendid embellishments of Paris, all "tremendously 'artistic' and decorative" in its many "museums and gardens and . . . principal churches,"<sup>1</sup> he finds himself "transported" to "wider fields of knowledge" and "higher sensations" (PC 121) than he had ever known as a worker or as a revolutionary. Before his trip he had been quite familiar with poverty and injustice--the evidences of humanity's lowest impulses and

<sup>1</sup>The Princess Casamassima (1886); 3rd ed. rev., Vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 123.

perpetual lack of conscience--but the brilliance of the French capital gives him a view of mankind's better side. His radical ardor cools as he comes to perceive that he could not endanger the magnificent structures of this great city--or even overturn a political order which produces and protects such uplifting testimonies to the gifts intrinsic to man--for the sake of an untried, and possibly destructive theory of egalitarian government.

Although James's political naiveté is evident in this novel<sup>1</sup>--reflected in Hyacinth's opinions that democracies are inevitably inimical to artistry and that repressive governments are somehow exculpated by their narcissistic habit of erecting monuments to themselves--and while the bookbinder's discovery of his own taste does not resolve the problems that will lead to his suicide; Hyacinth is helped to a fuller understanding of himself and a trenchant awareness of his duty to his fellow man through his receptivity to art forms. He begins to think that he would do mankind a disservice by eliminating his poverty if, at the same time, he had to threaten or curtail his love for and his expression of beauty. Torn by the moral indecision brought

<sup>1</sup>James, as Matthiessen declares, was "often at his flimsiest on the subject of politics." James's own admission, that public affairs were "a spectacle merely" to him, "from which judgment and prophecy were withheld" coincides with Matthiessen's statement (The James Family, p. 646).

on by his inability to break his word<sup>1</sup> and his new perception into the needs of the human soul, Hyacinth shoots himself.

This young artisan's quandary underscores the fact that there remains yet another aspect of the Jamesian aesthetic to consider. Beyond the use of art objects as tools of construction and as metaphors, Henry James deliberately worked the moral overtones of art into his plots and themes. Although James drew a strict line of demarcation between the media through which these two primary impulses of the imagination, the moral and aesthetic senses, operate--believing that "the aesthetic clue in general" arose from and was conveyed through matter, (AN 312) while "the musing moralist"<sup>2</sup> relied, for the source of his interest, on the welter of acts and intentions generated by man--he also recognized that art, being, in his view, so closely interconnected with the "human side"<sup>3</sup> of life, was often indirectly associated with ethical considerations. For example, while the concrete forms of art, such as statues or pictures, cannot, being

<sup>1</sup>Hyacinth took an oath, early in the novel, to perform whatever task his secretive anarchist group required of him. Being, as James makes clear, of a constitution inherently noble--whether or not he was, as he believed, a nobleman's son by birth--Hyacinth felt he could not break his word, even after he had lost sympathy with the goals and methods of revolutionaries.

<sup>2</sup>The American Scene, p. 383.

<sup>3</sup>[*ibid.*, p. 436.

objects, be immoral because they have not any "conscious moral purpose,"<sup>1</sup> and while James strongly objected to the moral cowardice that forbade certain subjects to be mentioned in fiction, and deplored the shortsightedness which prompted many novelists to lecture and lay down ethical "rigidities and rules,"<sup>2</sup> the conscious purposes of the artist were another matter altogether. The artist, being a man, has moral decisions to make regarding his work. Most of these involve standards of vision, objectivity and craftsmanship. The readers of novels and the lovers of paintings also, as we have seen in part, have an investment in art which is indirectly ethical because of the opportunities the art object offers as an elicitor and refiner of complex states of feelings and intricate patterns of form. Art sharpens our minds and our sensitivities for further use in the human sphere. Whatever noetic distinctions one wishes to preserve between, as James phrased it, "the moral side" and "the artist side"<sup>3</sup> of life, the study of James's fiction is a study, in large part, of "the terms of interpenetration" (AB 493) between these two regions. With this in mind, the following segment of this paper will concentrate explicitly upon the ways in which, for James, the moral vision

<sup>1</sup>The Future of the Novel, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I, p. 251.

completes the aesthetic.

As good a way as any to introduce James's views on the ethical by-products of art might be to contrast and compare them with the opinions of another writer on the same subject. In the opinion of Percy Bysshe Shelley, the "great instrument of moral good is the imagination."<sup>1</sup> Shelley does not, as James does, formally differentiate between the moral and artistic branches of the imaginative faculty, but he does attend to the imagination in its purely aesthetic bent (in which the synthetic intelligence is directed to discoveries of order and symmetry on the surface of reality and in objects rather than toward the desires and scruples of the interior man) and finds that it has its own appropriate layer of principle to bestow. The aesthetic sense, apart from the realm of intersubjectivity or the treatment of man by man, "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar."<sup>2</sup>

This creative affirmation of objective reality, a kind of reflective baptism into a new respect and concern for the beauty, integrity and instructive properties of things, reveals the entire province of materiality in its sacred office of nourishment for the mind and body of man.

<sup>1</sup>Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry" (1821); rpt. in David Perkins, ed. English Romantic Writers (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), p. 1076.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

It makes sentient life, with its powers of appropriation, not merely a task imposed upon a creature who did not choose to be complex, but a blessing which opens onto an unlimited opportunity for appreciation. For Shelley, the imagination is unified; moral and aesthetic curiosity, discovery and innovation, the universes of matter and man, are fused in their fount of primal origin, the bond of love. Man is, in his capacity for identity and in his gratitude for information, his environment, and the environment is, in turn, the man who observes and melts into it. Shelley turns, without any apparent perception of schism, from the physical world to the human in completing his thought:

The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own.<sup>1</sup>

For the most part, Henry James would find little to disagree with in this statement. He too held the attempt to "get into the skin of the fellow creature" in high regard as a "creative effort" (AN 37). He also believed, as the histories of Isabel Archer and Hyacinth Robinson attest, that an admiring response to the "beautiful," especially those external forms shaped by the artist, invigorated and trained the individual in his endeavors to get to the bottom of

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

himself and others. Furthermore, in his correspondence, James reiterates the spirit of Shelley's passionate regard for the therapeutic and inspirational properties of natural and manmade objects and appearances. In a letter, James advises a despondent friend to "cultivate the day-to-day and the hand-to-mouth and the questions-be-damned" attitude for awhile.<sup>1</sup> Such "idle" living provides the conditions for "laying up the most precious treasure." By simply observing "grandeurs and beauties" and putting aside "responsibilities and superstitions"<sup>2</sup> for a space, one's soul is fortified in the sheer joy of being and the mind is refreshed for its eventual return to the workaday world.

Yet, for all his esteem for "the authenticity of concrete existence" (AN 311) and for the ability of the imaginative man to "put himself in other people's place"<sup>3</sup> and in spite of his delight in "the many chambers of the palace of art,"<sup>4</sup> Henry James could not have acquiesced in Shelley's readily unified imagination. Much of the Jamesian conception of the condition of man depends upon the detailed observation of those individuals, the too-easily satisfied

<sup>1</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>3</sup>Henry James, English Hours, (1905); rpt., intro. Quentin Anderson (New York: Horizon Press, 1968), pp. 57, 8.

<sup>4</sup>The Painter's Eye, p. 85.

or shallow character and the too-conventional or doctrinaire figure, who cannot bridge the gap between surface and meaning, outward form and inner significance, and therefore hang suspended in "the mere visual"<sup>1</sup> or in the proscriptive domain of "abstract inhuman reasons" and theories. (AB 219) The narrator of "The Aspern Papers," Christopher Newman and Gilbert Osmond, for all their divergencies of type, offer good examples of this incapacity, for one reason and another, to confront and penetrate themselves and/or their surroundings. Mending the rift between appearance and meaning, the aesthetic and moral vision, becomes, for James's characters, an arena where dramatic conflict and thematic tension thrive. The achievement of the unified imagination is the work of a lifetime, not a given philosophical premise. It can occur only after the mental husks of conventionality, dogmatism and superficiality have been discarded. This discussion will presently examine the ways in which James's fictional figures either attained or fell short of this fusion of insight; but, for the moment, this larger issue must recede in favor of a detailed analysis of the specific ways in which the Jamesian aesthetic was imbued with indirect moral implications.

To James's way of thinking, it was obligatory for the serious artist to "know as much as possible" about his subject, which was always, at bottom, human nature. Moreover, "the only way to know," as he saw it, was "to have lived and

<sup>1</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I, p. 408.



loved and . . . floundered and enjoyed and suffered."<sup>1</sup>  
 This is not to say that one need live extensively, through many different occupations or classes, but simply that one live with intensity, determined to lose nothing that comes one's way and relying, for the rest, for what one has not seen, on the imaginative "power . . . to trace the implication of things."<sup>2</sup> This injunction applies not only to "the artist's prime sensibility" (AN 45). It also bears upon his accountability for both "the love of beauty, of art, the aesthetic view of life"<sup>3</sup> and "the personal, the moral inquiry" (AB 507) as adjuncts of his own curiosity and as influences in his work; it also extends to "technical problems"<sup>4</sup> and the hard-won ability to "evolve the conditions" of a story or picture and "build in the subject."<sup>5</sup> In fact, for the novelist, the more involved his theme and topic, the "more complicated" the "soul" of the character he tries to create, the greater need he has for a highly wrought skill in detecting and reflecting the "shades" of reality, which for James, demand "the formative literary discipline."<sup>6</sup>

James was quite aware that one "writes as (one) can" and that there are "many explorations of the house of

<sup>1</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 323.

<sup>2</sup>The Future of the Novel, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>The American Scene, p. 57.

<sup>4</sup>The James Family, p. 675.      <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 506.

<sup>6</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 271.

life."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, he was adamant in his conviction that the artist's capacity to "see deep into his subject," "undergo it," and "discover . . . things beneath the surface,"<sup>2</sup> depended as much upon his craftsmanship as upon his dedication, his rigorous exactness of observation and the breadth and quality of his thought. Structural design and content were, to James, two sides of the same coin. Thus, "form and substance were" as he wrote to Hugh Walpole, the same insofar as "selection and comparison are . . . of the very essence of art."<sup>3</sup> To him, an exacting, but not prescriptive writer, "form alone takes, and holds and preserves substance."<sup>4</sup> There is no substitute for "doing it well" because that extremity is the only sure antidote for the "usual imbecility of the novel" wherein "the reader" due to lack of auctorial execution "never touches the subject and the subject never touches the reader."<sup>5</sup> All this tends to prove that James, who expressed "a horror of dogmatism,"<sup>6</sup> was one of the least opprobrious moralists among

<sup>1</sup>The Future of the Novel, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>The James Family, p. 529.

<sup>3</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I, p. 237.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>5</sup>The James Family, p. 507.

<sup>6</sup>Henry James, Literary Reviews and Essays, ed. Albert Mordell (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1957), p. 34.

English and American novelists of his day, and one of the most demanding mentors for the would-be artist. What he demanded, moreover, was not "slavery" to "the most approved patterns" (AB 142) of composition, but a seriousness of purpose with regard to form, substance and personal preparation.

There are other moral desiderata which likewise circumscribe the Jamesian concept of artistry. One of these, "the religion of doing" (AN 347), in the author's terminology, is the by-product of James's New England heritage. If the American Puritan believed that personal prosperity was a sign of divine favor, and that the will to labor long and hard in the economic vineyard was emblematic of a soul acting in conformity with the Deity's blueprint for the elect, then James's pride in "the tenacity of (his) impression" and "the fact that I have lost nothing," as he claims "of what I saw," (AB 60) are indications of a double, secular translation of those earlier Calvinistic tenets.<sup>1</sup> While the Yankee merchant had gradually weaned hard work away from its religious connotations, and had come to value it for its own sake as a gauge of perseverance and individual worth, as well as for the dollars it reaped, Henry James further transported it

<sup>1</sup>For a doctrinal overview of the development of American Puritanism, Congregationalism and the Calvinistic elements in these sects, see Religion in America, by George C. Bedell, Leo Sand, and Charles T. Wellborn (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1975), especially pp. 17-20 and 136-41. For a more exhaustive and detailed treatment than the broad survey just cited provides, consult Thomas H. Johnson's and Perry Miller's The Puritans, ed. George McCandlish, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

from the business world, "the realm of application," to the artist's studio and the "realm of appreciation." (AN 65) James expropriated the energy behind the shrewd-minded shopkeeper's bargaining in material goods and applied it, within a new ethical frame which demanded another sort of thoroughness, to the "art of reflection." The proprietor of the workshop of art cannot rest until he has turned his own sort of profit and inventoried "the multitudinous pressure of all human situations and pictures, the surge and pressure of life."<sup>1</sup>

Nick Dormer, one of the two protagonists of The Tragic Muse (the other being the rising young actress, Miriam Rooth), exemplifies, in his behavior, yet another of the outgrowths of conscience which envelop James's depiction of artistic intelligence. This young man, the surviving scion of a famous and eloquent spokesman for the Liberal Party in the House of Commons, is earmarked, as the novel opens, for a career in politics. Nearly all the incentives that commonly influence a man's choice of profession--money, love, prestige and power--converge in a single channel to sweep Dormer towards the open sea of public office. He has the benefit of a celebrated name and, therefore, a solid consensus of support within his father's party. He has, without seeking the honor, become the protégé of a wealthy,

<sup>1</sup>The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 135.

amateur political buff and partisan Liberal, Mr. Carteret. This single-minded old gentleman has made it transparently clear that a goodly sum will be settled on the young man should he win, and fight to maintain, a seat in Parliament. It should also be mentioned that Nick, with his native charm and intelligence, and with an effective oratorical style, has a strong flair for politics.

However, the inducements to statesmanship do not stop there. Julia Dallow, a young, rich and clever widow, is not only Nick's principal love interest, but his campaign manager and chief contributor as well. She has made it fairly obvious that, should he run successfully for office, one of the benefits he stands to gain, provided he desires to obtain it, would be her hand in marriage. Julia's one overriding goal in life is to marry a prominent politician and "be concerned in great things" as his helpmate and advisor.<sup>1</sup> She is "beautiful . . . refined and quiet" (TM 80), but absolutely intolerant of any ideal unconnected with "an anxiousness about the public good" (TM 221) and indifferent to any career outside "public affairs." (TM 223)

Dormer, after much soul-searching, decides to cast all his prospects for immediate worldly advantage away and concentrate upon a life of artistry as a portrait painter. Resolved to "cultivate his own garden" (TM 310) rather than

<sup>1</sup>The Tragic Muse (1890); rpt., intro. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Dell Publishing, 1961), p. 188.

bow to the pressures of practicality and popularity, he is most troubled not by the advantages he foregoes, but by the bitter disappointment of his mother, Lady Agnes. This status-conscious woman keenly appreciates the wealth and possible fame which her son spurns. She also, along with the vast majority of middle-class, Philistine England, considers art a basically trivial and slightly immoral field. (TM 28) Furthermore, she thinks her son "selfish" in his decision to follow his deepest instincts and desires and become a painter. (TM 192) Nick, however, sees himself acting, in his ultimate choice, "with unimpeachable honour." (TM 209 and 405) He takes the claims and counsels of friends and family with profound gravity, and does not, as he sees it, make his decision lightly or with only his own comfort in mind. Acting in conformity with the dictum of Polonius, Nick was finally determined that his only option lies in being true to himself.

His brief tenure as a Member of Parliament has shown him only that his constituents, "a parcel of cheese-eating," well-to-do "burgesses" (TM 403), do not require his advocacy, and that political rhetoric turns to dross in his mouth in the form of various empty appeals "to the love of names and places" and "the love of hollow, idiotic words." (TM 88) Nick wishes to serve mankind as well as satisfy himself, but he discovers that statesmanship bores him instead of motivating his efforts and sharpening his talents. Painting, on the

other hand, enlivens him and gives him an alternate way to "educate . . . and exalt" humanity. (TM 292) As an artist, he hopes to fulfill the terms of Polonius's adage and more: Nick intends not merely "not" to "be false to any man,"<sup>1</sup> but to minister actively to the needs of all men by preserving and advancing, in his own small way, their cultural heritage.

James reveals in this novel, among other things, that the choice of art as a profession can be a moral decision. The lesson most clearly exhibited by Dormer's dilemma, however, transcends the deliberation of a single person. This history of an artist in the making also comprises a gentle campaign of persuasion which combats the ingrained prejudices against art which were so common in England and America in James's day. Lady Agnes and Julia Dallow, who both think ill of the aesthetic sense, are representative as well as individual targets for mild admonishment. James meant to show in The Tragic Muse that "the career of art" which had "again and again been deprecated in the lips of anxiety and authority as a departure from the career of business, of industry and respectability" was as constructive as, and often even beneficial to, "the so-called regular life."<sup>2</sup>

There are also ethical repercussions in the power of the arts to inspire people, for beauty often instills not only

<sup>1</sup>Hamlet, Act I, sc. III; l. 80.

<sup>2</sup>The James Family, p. 94.

a desire to create further beauty, but disposes the beholder to think better of himself and of others as well. Loveliness and symmetry promote joy and satisfaction and the wish to share both feelings. Beyond this universal potency in art, however, there exists throughout James's work a special kind of aesthetic inspiration which issues from a singular source. From his first published novel, to his last long work before his interim as a playwright, The Tragic Muse, and on to one of the great novels of his full maturity, The Ambassadors, Henry James evinced a particular penchant and purpose for subjecting various members of his fictional cast to the site of a noble ruin or an ancient cathedral.<sup>1</sup> To document each instance in the long list of such pilgrimages would consume a disproportionate amount of space; but James's objectives in using such locations can be mentioned more concisely and are of relevance to this investigation. In the first place, the visitation of a stately structure can infuse one, as it does for Hyacinth Robinson during his vacation in Paris or for Nick Dormer at the walls of an abandoned abbey

<sup>1</sup>Examples of such "cathedral-hunting adventure" (as Maggie Verver refers to these sojourns in The Golden Bowl) which occur in The Ambassadors and The Tragic Muse will be incorporated within the main body of this study. Nora, the heroine of Watch and Ward, is an American girl, from the midwest, who has the good fortune to immerse herself in the wonders of Europe. She leaves in the guise of a rustic girl and returns "a superb young woman" . . . whose emerging powers of perception have been "fed by the sources of aesthetic delight." The "old-world drawing rooms with . . . moulded ceilings" and ancient churches have "raised her nature to its allotted level" [Henry James, Watch and Ward (1878); rpt., intro. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1960), pp. 145, 147].



(TM 381), with a deep admiration for the energy and ingenuity of one's human predecessors and an unqualified respect for the artistic and spiritual tradition they bequeathed. Secondly, and more pervasively, such edifices imbue the spectator with either a strong sense of vital human continuity and community through time or with a semi-romantic, half-nostalgic glimpse of a period when, to quote a character from the short story, "The Madonna of the Future," "people's religious and esthetic needs went arm in arm."<sup>1</sup>

Under the first of these spells, a figure like Isabel Archer can, as we have seen, identify with the fundamental urges and conditions of the human race, while a somewhat less discerning character, like Roderick Hudson's friend, Rowland Mallet, can obscurely feel the "developing" potency, the civilizing vigor, of St. Peter's. (RH 227)

Under the mood of romance or nostalgia, the rapt observer, such as Lambert Strether in the cathedral of Notre Dame, recalls, so far as he is able, a former age that was redolent with, and still imparts a lingering "sense of safety" and "of simplification" which are "soothing even to sanctity." (Amb 179) To supply what Strether cannot--for he is cut off from that simpler time whose religion offers "no direct voice for his soul" (Amb 179)--the earlier era, of which he vaguely senses remnants in the atmosphere of the

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, "The Madonna of the Future," (1873); rpt. in Stories of Writers and Artists, n.d., pp. 15-49.

huge old church, corresponds to a time in Western Europe when one, ubiquitous Christianity underscored all human endeavor and achievement. During the Middle Ages, the faith and the imagination of Europe were fused and dedicated to, as well as upheld by, a Divinity which all men, ostensibly, held in common reverence. Art and duty were one then, or, at least, different degrees and applications of the same religious impulse. The treatment of one's fellow man and the carving of a frieze were directed by the same supernatural source. As physical acts, they obviously evinced different methods, worked through unlike substances and achieved disparate results. As acts of worship, however, they manifested the same respect for the God who gave man and his labor their dignity and value.<sup>1</sup>

By the late 19th century, or the era in which James grew to maturity as a writer, the medieval solidarity of religious belief and the single Supreme Focus for the creative intelligence had undergone many debates and open divisions. The gradual process known as the Renaissance

<sup>1</sup>Antoine De Saint-Exupéry describes this sense of unity in theocentric societies in the following terms, which refer to the universality of belief in Roman Catholicism in France during the Middle-Ages: "Men were brothers in God. One can be a brother only in something. Where there is no tie that binds men, men are not united but merely lined up" ["The Awakening," rpt. in Defeat and Beyond, eds. George Bernauer and Germaine Brée, Lewis Galantieri, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), pp. 322-23].

incorporated, as one of its facets, the severance of scientific inquiry from the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church and the dominion of the traditional concept of a theocentric universe. A 17th century son of this rift between clerical authority and an emerging, purely secular rationalism, Blaise Pascal of France, became a strong spokesman for both sides of the conflict and attempted to build a reuniting bridge between them. Feeling the pull both of science and traditional faith, Pascal is probably as good a representative of the central ideological tension of this time as any one man can possibly be. At any rate, as a great mathematician and a true believer, he tried to give each faction, Church and Science, its due.

Within this very attempt at synthesis, however, Pascal made an observation that intensified the widening chasm between faith and reason, feeling and thought, when he noted that the study of man and the study of matter demand the use of different tools. The "mathematical intellect," which is "able to comprehend a great number of premises" about materiality "without confusing them" may or may not operate in conjunction with the "precise intellect" which penetrates "deeply into the conclusion of given premises."<sup>1</sup> Both

<sup>1</sup>Blaise Pascal, Pensées, intro. T. S. Eliot (rpt.; New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1958), p. 3.

operations are necessary, however, before the laws of the physical universe can be derived. Yet, both together, while useful in part, are not sufficient to understand the organism, man. Man must be weighed not only by the mind, but also by "the intuitions of the heart" which are, in turn, the temporal foundation of "principles" and "good maxims"<sup>1</sup>--although the intellect formulates the laws, ethical and civil, and arranges to enforce them according to the patterns of human incontinence and conflicting desires--and our primary connecting link with "divinity."<sup>2</sup> This stratification of reality into metaphysical layers of matter, man and deity, and the diversification of the sources of knowledge into the separate realms of "reason, custom" and "inspiration,"<sup>3</sup> form a cohesive catalogue at Pascal's hands. Yet, at the same time, they open a Pandora's box for thinkers who have not an equal instinct or motivation for a reconciliation between God and man.<sup>4</sup>

Science, of course, won its independence from the authority of the Church, and in the wake of that defection others followed. In the Reformation the Church in Rome also lost its exclusive sway over philosophy and theology. There no longer obtained just one, official, absolute conception of

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>4</sup>For a more detailed analysis of Pascal's thought and period, a good source of information and insight is Pascal, The Emergence of Genius by Emile Calliet, intro. by C. S. Duthie, 2nd ed., rev. (New York: Harper Bros., 1961).

the relationship between God and man which was upheld by a single, centralized governing religious body invested with the prerogative to combat and eliminate heresies. Instead, numerous interpretations of God and man and the duties owed each by the other appeared, and religious authority became dispersed. Soon, science, ethics, philosophy and aesthetics became specialized branches of knowledge, having little or no intrinsic connection with one another. Man's mind, for good or ill, became segmented: a palace of opinionation for the contentious and the ignorant; a chamber of endless research into many autonomous disciplines for the learned and the just.<sup>1</sup>

Against this shifting backdrop of compartmentalization and the consequent formulation of truths more and more problematical, Henry James, like all serious realists, had to construct his own model for the paradoxes, the private religions and the cultural eddies that divided men. Although he could not be, as he admitted, "theological" in his thought,<sup>2</sup> and although his only foray into the world of

<sup>1</sup>This much-condensed version of the Reformation and its consequences was culled from the facts and explanations presented in a variety of sources. The conditions underlying the Reformation and Renaissance, the Medieval "single, common way of viewing the universe" which gave way "to the new outlooks and varied ways of the modern world" are provided by The Evolution of Medieval Thought by David Knowles (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 340. Also relevant is The Seventeenth Century Background by Basil Willey (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953). In addition, see This Realm of England by Lacey Baldwin Smith (Boston, D. C. Heath and Co., 1966).

<sup>2</sup>Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, pp. 111+112.

technology and science, coming in a term spent at "the Polytechnic School at Zurich," (AB 240) was a complete disaster, there are faint similarities between Pascal and James. In spite of their many divergencies, both felt that man was torn between two warring elements in his perception and his society, and both attempted to span the gulf by building a personal synthesis. James's fight to stem the tide of factionalism among men, however, can be expressed, in part, by the final moral inference of his art.

Art, as James saw it, not only preserves the memory and the example of vital faiths and efforts; it also, to a degree, salvages the present. Art contributes a "sublime economy" which "rescues and saves" a "tiny . . . indestructible nugget" of selected life, here and there, amid the rush and "splendid waste," the "inclusion and confusion," of multifarious experience. (AN 120) The artist, by his "habit of vigilance" (AN 122) in close observation, sensitive retelling and technical dexterity, acts as a guardian and recorder of his own generation's civilization just as his teachers, the glorious mutes who speak through the art forms from the past, preserved and transmitted theirs.

As to the Jamesian version of the chasms in thought and feeling which divide men, one such dichotomy in his fiction warrants particular attention in light of the topics raised thus far in this chapter. To this purpose, one of the most omnipresent of his "donnees" or integral ideas, often

referred to by critics, and by James himself, as the "international" issue, must be pursued.<sup>1</sup> Very briefly, this involves the familiar premise, in his work, of introducing an inexperienced and often young, but very bright and expectant, provincial to the seemingly glamorous and obviously complicated ambience of the great city and/or polished, involuted Old World customs. This central figure, newly engulfed by esoteric manners and strange mores, is subjected to a cultural immersion which challenges beliefs and modes of behavior that had formerly gone unquestioned. Quite bewildered and threatened, yet deeply stirred by this initiation, the central register typically refashions, or tries to, his conceptions of society himself. Each center of consciousness has his own list of collective or national philosophies and superstitions to discard and absorb. All of these regional doctrines, however, like proliferating religions and insular educations which unite a few men while separating them from many more, are analogous and often directly attributable to the two societies, European and American, from which Henry James himself sprang.

<sup>1</sup>Fairly typical of these treatments is that afforded by Lyall H. Powers in his book, Henry James: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp. 114-16. James offers a few thoughts of his own concerning the "Americano-European prospect" on pp. 188-91 of The Art of the Novel and elsewhere in that collection of his critical prefaces. For a more extensive view of this topic with regard to the James family as a whole see the chapter of The James Family entitled "Europe and/or America?," pp. 206-314.

The essential friction inherent in the international theme, to which all the rites of initiation in James's fiction are related, can be succinctly put forth in an observation made by James about the character of a cousin. "She has nothing to do," he wrote, "with the European world of associations and art and studies," for, in his opinion, "she belongs to the deep domestic moral affectional realm" of America.<sup>1</sup> Although he speaks here from the bias of a youthful American with ties to his homeland still strong, and while his impressions of both continents altered much as his residence in England lengthened, James maintained the view that America, in its relative innocence and lack of historical precedent, laid stress upon the inner man and, for want of illustrious paragons and the orbit of royalty to obscure the individual, upon what that man had it in him to make of himself.

The land of Emerson and Hawthorne engendered "a society at once very simple and very responsible" with a surprising amount of "moral attention to give."<sup>2</sup> Europe, to the contrary, tended to emphasize the external man and the position and property conferred by the ancient, but still operative, workings of the class structure and social privilege. James came to have increasing respect for the older

<sup>1</sup>The James Family, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 440, 443.



civilization of Europe and "its complex social machinery."<sup>1</sup> He loved the "elegance" and the multiplicity of "objects of vision" (AB 570) offered by the elaborate structures, the "traditional forms" both of architecture and "good society," (AB 483) which abounded in the older cultures of France, Italy and England. This highly "figureable world" offered food for thought as well as "pearls of differentiation" (AB 449) which are so invaluable for the artist who wishes to render "nuances"<sup>2</sup> as well as "types," and provide both in "endless variety." (AB 19) James sympathized with the upper classes in their functions as living repositories of intelligible codes of behavior and as conservers of the "forms" which are so fertile for the eager and discriminating writer.<sup>3</sup> But he recognized, at the same time, a troubling tendency to live in mere spectatorship or "unballasted aestheticism"<sup>4</sup> among many members of the European community. Furthermore, he spied in the "theory of noble indifference" among aristocracies growing "forlorn" and useless, an attitude of thinly concealed "avidity" (AN 36) which, when coupled with the economic and legal inequities countenanced by that same high aloofness, exposed, to his view, a social order built on decidedly "collapsible" foundations.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, Hawthorne (1879); rpt., intro. Quentin Anderson (New York: Collier Books, 1966), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 141.

<sup>3</sup>The Future of the Novel, p. 81. <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>5</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I, p. 128.

Nevertheless, James became more and more pleased with the sights and inspirations proffered by the intricate European "tapestry," (AB 561) and increasingly critical of his native country as time passed. The American Scene, for example, is characteristic of his mature opinion of that young, burgeoning land. This book is full of exclamations of distress at the want of taste and the narrow-minded pursuits of its citizens, who live in "a social sameness" appropriate for "an army of puppets."<sup>1</sup>

While the sweeping generalities and subjective opinions expressed about these two continents and cultures are of doubtful value as objective truths, they do, in a broad sense, convey James's estimations of Europe and America. In addition, they serve as a fitting introduction to an early James novel, The Europeans, which concentrated almost exclusively upon the international conflict for its theme. In fact, the relative weakness of this book is directly attributable to the fact that it is ruled, to a degree extraordinary in a work by James, by idea. The characters in the novel, although far from flimsy, are, comparatively speaking, underdeveloped shadows who dance to the tunes set forth by jangling cultures. The book is not without considerable merit, however; especially as a barometer for a few of the Jamesian conceptions of the divergences between the European

<sup>1</sup>The American Scene, pp. 104, 107.

and American mentalities and styles of life in the mid-19th century.

The novel begins by introducing two of its main characters, Eugenia Munster, a German Baroness, and her brother, Felix Young. This pair is staying in a Boston hotel prior to visiting their sober and taciturn uncle, Mr. Wentworth, who lives in rural Massachusetts with his three children, Gertrude, Charlotte and Clifford. Neither Felix nor Eugenia have much money, and the Baroness has come to America and the New England birthplace of her mother in order to make a good impression on her provincial relatives and, through them, to meet some rich farmer or merchant. She intends, in other words, to "make her fortune" from this trip.<sup>1</sup> Felix, who has led the nomadic life of a gypsy and who sports an indefatigably "joyous and genial" nature (E 14), has come along simply for the diverting ride and the prospect of encountering strange people in a strange land.

To boil a rather tangled plot down to its final components, the Baroness, for all her wiles, fails in her plans for a lucrative marriage, while Felix, lacking strategems, succeeds where he had not expected to compete. This young man, a seeker of innocent pleasures such as the company of his pretty female cousins and the wide indulgence of his

<sup>1</sup>The Europeans (1878); rpt., ed. and intro. Richard Poirier (New York: Signet Books, 1964), p. 15.

"pictorial sense," falls in love with and inspires a reciprocal affection in Gertrude Wentworth. Eugenia almost accomplishes a similar symbolic intermingling of cultures, but just fails to mystify Robert Acton, a wealthy American trader, into a proposal of marriage. She is ultimately defeated, not by a character fault, but by the inability, which is widespread and lethal in this company, of persons from one society and moral climate to come to terms with persons of another.

The one episode in which The Europeans signally exhibits this interpersonal intransigence revolves about nocturnal visits made by twenty-year old Clifford Wentworth to the bed-chamber of the Baroness. Eugenia has taken the notion, implanted by Felix, that poor Clifford, who drinks a little too much and whose manners are imperfect, needs, as the son of an affluent and eminent man, to know "how to carry himself." (E 112) Thus, in the Continental belief that "the influence of a woman" will "stimulate the . . . aesthetic consciousness" (E 97) and move the young man to take greater pains in behalf of his appearance and behavior, the Baroness decides to "take him in hand." (E 111) One evening, as Acton is walking past Eugenia's house toward her front door for the purpose of making a visit, he spies Clifford through the window. Upon being admitted himself, he discovers that the fellow has secreted himself in a darkened room adjacent to Eugenia's bedroom. Roused from his hiding place, Clifford stammers an incoherent excuse to explain his presence and

stumbles off into the night. The Baroness, however, in her vanity and ignorance of American mores, offers the worst explanation possible. She claims that the boy was there because he had "fallen in love with her." (E 127) Acton finds, however, upon questioning young Wentworth, that the lady's account is, as he had suspected, patently untrue. While he suspects her of nothing licentious, he does begin to regard Eugenia with perplexed wariness as a woman who could not be trusted to tell the truth. (E 153) Although he had been considering a serious courtship of her, Acton senses that this lady from "an elder world" (E 177) is too complicated for him. Finally, "losing patience" (E 154), he concludes that the Baroness and he have too little in common to build a life together.

This skirmish of irreconcilable customs persists throughout the novel because of the fixed constitution of the people who inhabit it. Mr. Wentworth, the Formal, whose first name is never mentioned, is perhaps the most inelastic member of the whole crew. He is, for example, all but hopelessly "frozen" in his humorless, "unimaginative," Puritan cast of mind. (E 34 + 171) He spends countless, sleepless nights in summing up his ethical obligations, choosing among the fittest ways to discharge them, and fretting about those duties he may have overlooked. A man trained to doubt himself, he is continually sounding his conscience and suspecting, after the manner of "very rigid people" (E 97),

evil intentions and horrible flaws in everyone. Although he has no specific evil to charge them with, Felix and Eugenia seem flighty and frivolous to uncle Wentworth. They speak "a different language"--one of "enjoyment" and excessive "ornament" (E 34 + 85)--than any he had ever heard. As an example of the "ascetic type" (E 63), this scruple-ridden insurance salesman illustrates well the deadening effect of the American, or, more precisely, the New England emphasis upon rigid ethical laws and abstract formulas. Such inflexible standards not only govern man; they build a wall of stone around his soul to ward off all "superfluous fears" (E 111) and, incidentally, all unfamiliar ideas and people as well.

Mr. Wentworth is not the only attitudinal villain in the piece, however, for his opposite number, the Baroness Munster, serves as a prototype for a number of harmful European outlooks. She is a vain, manipulative and impulsive woman who, having vented her youthful appetite for chivalry in a morganatic marriage to a German Prince, now intends to pursue the other half of the Old World ideal of position plus prosperity by, as we have noted, wedding an American financial wizard. A person of ten minds, and moods beyond counting, who does not know, herself, from one day to the next, what she will intend or expect, but does know how to conceal both (E 138), the Baroness represents a society no longer much moved by individualistic values and transcendental ideals. She is Europe, and Europe judges people

according to the influences exerted by title and wealth--by, in short, temporal sway and the power to array oneself and position others. The following comparisons give examples of the mores of both cultures: Mr. Wentworth and Mr. Brand, an intense, young Unitarian minister, are concerned that Felix and Eugenia may, in their exotic manners and opinions, corrupt impressionable Gertrude's immortal soul, "the seat of her self-control" (E 49); while, on the other side of the great societal divide, Mr. Young (who is never addressed with such formality in the novel) articulates his own and his sister's "moral grounds" (E 166) by acknowledging that it doubtlessly seems improper for a poor man to court a rich girl. The "immoral," in European terms, is pretty much synonymous with "indecorous."

Only one character in the book has sufficient imagination--a double-charged imagination--to penetrate the factions of both worlds. Gertrude Wentworth, a pretty, intelligent girl whose life, up to the time of her cousin's arrival, has been "much-meditating" (E 38) and "duty" oriented (E 165), is flexible enough, in temperament and mind, to understand both her unbending American suitor, Mr. Brand, and Felix, who is, to her experience, a unique being. By the time the European couple enter her life, Gertrude has been gorged with bookish morality and severe "abstractions." (E 145) She requires, as she instinctively realizes, some "delicate sensual pleasure," some innocuous contact with the

merely lovely and "the concrete" (E 145), in order to balance and finish her "natural education." (E 107) Although she sees that Felix is incomplete, incapable of taking "a painful view of life" (E 68) or focusing upon unfortunate realities; and that his concept of virtue refers to "forms of beauty" (E 92), the proprieties of looking well rather than of being systematically righteous, she loves him all the same for the refreshing novelty of his "good spirits and goodwill." (E 141) Moreover, she finds she needs his guidance into the captivating European diversity of appearances, both the splendid and the squalid.

Just as Gertrude comes to know Felix and his lively, but limited imagination, so she had earlier comprehended the equally limited, but oppositely oriented imagination of Mr. Brand. This sanctimonious clergyman has repeatedly asked Gertrude for her hand, not, as she comes to understand, because he loves her, but because he spies a tendency in her to overvalue, as he sees it, the dissipating avenues of "pleasure" and "amusement." Mr. Brand thinks that he can teach this somewhat wayward girl "to govern her temper." (E 109) He freely admits that he knows "nothing of art" (E 140), but he certainly has an excruciating knowledge of duty. Out of this enjoining sense he offers to marry Gertrude, and not for her sake alone. Brand loves Gertrude's sister, and he exercises a perverse sense of selfishness in denying himself the joy and satisfaction he would receive



by bending to his natural, emotional inclinations and asking Charlotte to marry him. He wills to frustrate love and make three people--himself; Gertrude, who hates his attention; and Charlotte, who loves him as he loves her--miserable in order that he might "have a fine moral pleasure." (E 172) Like a metaphysical Jack Spratt and his wife at the feast of existence, Mr. Brand cannot partake of the fat, the joy and sensual gratification in life, while Felix cannot swallow the lean portions of misery and drudgery. Gertrude, however, who possesses both the ascetic and aesthetic vision, receives nourishment at either side of the table.

It must be made clear, via a brief disclaimer, that the "types" portrayed in The Europeans do not exhaust the populations of the Continent or of America. Many other kinds of people, drawn from both cultures, will be exhibited as this study continues. The novel just discussed, however, does present, fairly accurately, the opposite poles of ideology and insight which Henry James tried to unite. One of these extremes, the aesthetic sense, has been the general topic of this chapter. Yet, for all its blessings of inspiration, its technical usefulness and even its ethical overtones, The Europeans suggests that the aesthetic branch of the imagination is not adequate to perceive or express man in his entirety. Felix Young, amateur artist and carefree spirit, gives some indications of the shortcomings and blindnesses which beset the purely aesthetic spirit, but there

exists in James's fiction a better example of the limitations of the artistic imagination. Gabriel Nash, the apostle of art-for-art's-sake and self-appointed advisor to Nick Dormer in The Tragic Muse, is an allegorical figure, the rarest of birds in James's fiction, who represents the unmixed impulse of pure aestheticism. A talented writer with a quick, discerning mind, Nash abandons literature after the publication of his first book because of the "inconveniences" of altering one's style to reach a large public, the demands of publishers and other, similarly "disagreeable" considerations. (TM 38 and 39) Nash is determined never to trouble about "dreary" things, such as work and responsibilities to others, again. Instead, he intends to devote his life to the cultivation of his own "feelings" and "sensations." (TM 140) His "duty," as he puts it, is simply to exist and observe and regard the world as an ornament. (TM 139) Although Nick regards him only half-seriously, "like a person in a fairytale or a melodrama," he is grateful for Nash's encouragement of his artistic career. Gabriel's irresponsibility and extravagant views help to counterbalance the solid wall of disapproval erected for the artist in Nick by his family and friends.

Yet, for all Gabriel's help as a "touchstone" of taste, (TM 290) his ephemeral nature is strongly emphasized in the last chapters of the novel. When asked to pose for a portrait by his friend, Nash hesitates, but finally agrees.

As Nick paints this "ambiguous" model, however, he notices that Nash, "indefinite and elusive" in his character, seems, incredibly, to fade away as his keen artist's observation fixes him ever more closely. Even more incredibly, the features in the nearly finished portrait do, "for all the world as in some delicate Hawthorne tale," grow gradually more indistinct from day to day. (TM 556) Thus, in this atypical way, James underlines the fact that Nash, in his indolent aestheticism and his attempt to substitute "conversation" and self-absorption for the duty of the true artist to share his vision and face the difficult challenge of executing it, actually tends to nullify the "beauty" of the world which he claims to espouse.

Nash's "philosophy" of self-indulgent connoisseurship is parasitical, for it gladly takes art works from the hands of others and offers nothing but fleeting talk in return. Obviously, if all artists followed Gabriel's doubtful lead, art would soon cease to exist. Nash is quite comfortable "living upon the irony and the interpretation of things" in his posture as "a being outside of the universe," but he cannot withstand being "himself interpreted." (TM 554)

Henry James, who rejoiced in his own aesthetic sense and "the luminous paradise of art" through which "the air of

life filled (his) lungs"<sup>1</sup> and who, from childhood, detested "pedantries of moralism,"<sup>2</sup> nevertheless understood that human nature or, more specifically, the imagination, requires another outlet besides the love of beauty and admiration of form to fulfill and express itself. Outside the domain of his novels and stories, this recognition, is directly stated in his critical essay on the works of the French writer, Gautier:

We do not really react upon natural impressions and assert our independence, until those impressions have been absorbed into our moral lives and become a mysterious part of moral passion.<sup>3</sup>

Without this moral dimension, moreover, "we stand forever in the chill external air which blows over the surface of things."

This is not to say that James was ignorant of the limitations of many moral stances, either. He knew that the modes of responsibility--real, fanciful and dogmatic--are every bit as various, and sometimes damaging, as the many applications of the aesthetic sense. For the story-teller, the best moral vision is not that which imposes censorship or spreads sententious axioms, but that which "surveys the whole ground." (AN 66) Similarly, for the objective thinker

<sup>1</sup>The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup>The James Family, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup>Literary Reviews and Essays, p. 97.

who would grasp life without illusions or deletions, the part of the imagination which allows us to transcend ourselves, and put ourselves in the place of another, must be taken account of in order to derive any concept of "a whole Humanity." (AN 66)

The following chapter will attempt to show how Henry James, who improvised and practiced a quasi-theory of knowledge by indirection, continued to explore the limitations, as well as the opportunities, of art, and expose the excesses, as well as the accuracies, of the moral impulse. Most of all, the final segment of this study will propose to reveal the Jamesian synthesis, the way in which the author united the two halves of the imagination, aesthetic and ascetic, in order to portray man in the depths of his being, rather than merely in the external boundaries he has laid out for himself or in the good resolutions he has cast as abstract edicts.

## CHAPTER IV

### A SECOND CHAMBER OF THE IMAGINATION: "THE PERSONAL, THE MORAL INQUIRY"<sup>1</sup>

The immediately previous chapter of this thesis dwelt upon James's conceptions of art, both as a thematic element in his work, and as an artery of perception. The chapter at hand will concentrate, indirectly and through inquiry into the works themselves, upon the rudiments of moral vision which exist, in varying degrees of meticulousness, among the characters in his fictional canon, and those few tenets which emerge, unscathed by the rigors of ignorance and prejudice, as final testaments of constructive human behavior. Nothing so presumptuous as a formulation of the ultimate Jamesian ethic will be attempted, however. Instead, a step-by-step review will be employed. It will take up the thread of analysis at the point where it was last dropped, and endeavor, novel by novel, to reconstruct James's final correlation between the imagination of form and the sense of human motive.

As a point of departure, it will be recalled that Henry James, as was shown in the last segment, was fully

<sup>1</sup>The Autobiography of Henry James, p. 507.

cognizant that the aesthetic sense of itself was an insufficient tool with which to confront and capture man in society. Art, as a means for ordering external reality, provides satisfactions and discloses methods which cannot reach to and are different in kind from the gratifications and responsibilities attending a glimpse of interna forma, the "inner character" of humanity. Consistent with and illustrative of this position are many of the opinions offered by Joseph Wood Krutch in his book, The Modern Temper.

Krutch asserts that a "thoroughgoing aestheticism" which proposes to regard life "as an art," while imposing no strictures on behavior apart from "considerations of style," is entirely inadequate as a guide to human conduct.<sup>1</sup> For an example of this cast of thought, Krutch searches history and discovers a strain of Gnosticism which, hopelessly baffled by the problem of good and evil, opted to beg the question by adopting "inclusive tolerance."<sup>2</sup> Such an invasion could only maintain consistency by regarding "the whole universe as a species of drama."<sup>3</sup> In effect, the great Playwright in his heavenly theatre is viewed as having introduced evil and suffering into the world for the "sake of contrast."<sup>4</sup> In the absence of "evil" we would, according to this scheme, be at

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Wood Krutch, The Modern Temper (1929; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1956), p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

a loss in our estimation of the "good." Similarly, without suffering we could not appreciate comfort and pleasure. Thus, the Gnostics held that evil, equally with virtue, served a useful purpose and was every bit as valuable.

The sophistry in this formulation should be fairly apparent. Rather than promoting consciousness and conscience, the Gnostic view encourages the double-edged hypocrisy of self-deceit; for the man who equates life with art and, like a drama critic, admires the virtuosity of any act, be it hostile or benevolent to self and society, is far advanced toward justifying crime because it gives its victim opportunities for rectitude to agencies of law-enforcement. This miasma of unaccountability--wherein ethical standards are eliminated in favor of sheer behavioral technique--results, as Krutch points out, from a generic distaste for the mental exertion of discrimination. Lacking paragons of introspection and viable instigators of duty, the great mass of humanity will follow the dictates of their own appetites and tend to view themselves, each in his own self-serving shell, as absolute artists of the universe of appropriate behavior. The essential fallacy of such ethical impressionism, which all of its apostles blindly ignore, is isolated by Krutch in the following paragraph:

The artist creates the world in which his imagination functions, but the world in which he lives is created for him and he cannot make life the material of an art because he lacks that complete control over both



outward events and their inward reverberations which would be necessary to enable him to do so.<sup>1</sup>

This is not to say, of course, that the artist is forbidden to draw from life in order to display a partial perspective of reality in the practice of his craft. Rather, Krutch suggests that the notion of personal creation be kept within proper boundaries; that the role of the artist or creator in conjunction with life is perfectly permissible, but that claims of absolute autonomy must be refuted. No one who is honest with himself and at all curious about his surroundings will long persist in the illusion that he, in a single mind and will, can explain and control, with absolute omniscience, the infinite "mutability of all temporalities."<sup>2</sup> Individual freedom, in the real world, implies neither license nor autocracy, but the exercise of conscious choice and the recognition of inevitable duties so that our own rights may be preserved in our care to observe the rights of all. Choice and duty, in turn, are dependent upon knowledge and the imaginative capacity to put self aside and contemplate alternate points of view and the circumstances which define other lives. Untempered aestheticism, then, is, in the broadest sense, immoral because, at its roots, it is anti-social and arbitrary. In the name of a mechanical tolerance

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>This phrase is borrowed, indirectly, from St. Augustine. Robert Burton uses it in The Anatomy of Melancholy, Vol. 3, (1651); intro. Holbrook Jackson, 5th ed., rpt. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1964), p. 15.

and in deference to entirely subjective opinions about "good and evil" it suspends judgment and dismisses the invisible bonds of responsibility that tie any rational society together.

Apart from any artistic conceits on the intellectual level of ideological postulations--such as the Gnostic's position--there abides another intrinsic weakness in the aesthetic vision which exists at the level of attitudes and emotions. This shortcoming resides within the nature of the act of artistic deliberation itself before the question of duty is resolved. It consists, briefly, of the inability to see that life is not cut from one continuous piece of multi-colored cloth. Fate moves in more than one dimension, and its designs elicit human responses which are divergent in kind as well as in form.

In the second volume of Either/Or Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, distinguishes among particular human acts by relegating them to their existential origins in "the aesthetical and the ethical" dispositions of the sentient agent.<sup>1</sup> In his view, the worthiness and correctness of a given action is determined not by correlation with conventional codes of conduct, but by the urgency of the situation

<sup>1</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, Vol. II (1843); trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian M. Swenson, rpt. in ed. Robert Bretall, A Kierkegaard Anthology (New York: The Modern Library, Random House, 1946), p. 97.

in which the act is placed and, on the human side, by the capacity of the agent to rise to any degree of seriousness. Although life presents many avenues where the exercise of the aesthetic sense is entirely appropriate, the man, in Kierkegaard's view, who is capable of no other than an "aesthetic choice" is capable of "no choice at all."<sup>1</sup> This is so because, as he puts it, the mind occupied solely with art is condemned to select from among "many merely incidental reflections and observations." The aesthetic spirit, for all the joy and "enthusiasm for art" it provides, remains non-committal when the chips are down. In the philosopher's opinion this spirit, of itself, is useless in times of crisis, making us "supercilious" with others, and leaves us content to "deliberate as . . . a universal critic in all faculties" among trifles.<sup>2</sup> What such a detached approach to reality cannot do is gamble by investing itself in a relationship or schemes which involve the risk of failure and pain.

The "ethical spirit," on the other hand, is not identified by any "questions of right" or moralisms, but by "the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which it chooses."<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard is not interested in aphorisms or commandments, but in fostering the courage necessary to make difficult decisions and, by taking chances, to become human.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

He is, unlike Krutch, concerned less with hypotheses of reason than with man's capacities for dedication in the affectional realm. He considers "ethical" the man who, at the risk of ruin or an insufficient fund of talent, decides to pursue an exacting profession. He is not curious about the fastidious popinjay or the censorious prude who inch through life on rigid rules, but about the person who permits himself to fall in love in spite of the horrors of rejection. In the last analysis, one becomes a person, acquires a personality and assumes a discernible form in proportion as one is willing to participate, as deeply as possible, in people, ideas, disciplines of learning, etcetera. Man "consolidates" himself by choosing and "immersing himself in the thing chosen."<sup>1</sup> He pays the price of paths unexplored, but he gains substance, perspective and the force of conviction. The committed man is full of life because he absorbs his beloved companions, his studies, the challenges of purposeful work. The wholly "aesthetic" man, on the opposite end of the spectrum, becomes either an airy thing or a dangerous leech--stopping only to gaze and classify before skipping on to other, equally transient diversions or attaching itself onto more fixed and solid organisms in order to gain a free ride.

Henry James expressed sentiments quite similar to these throughout his fiction as, I think, the characteriza-

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

of Nick Dormer and Gabriel Nash, in The Tragic Muse, Felix (H)oung in The Europeans, and Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady, illustrate. More directly, he delivered himself of a slice of very similar philosophy, in a letter to a despondent friend, when he insisted that each of us "must be as solid and dense and fixed" as possible. We must not, he goes on, "melt too much into the universe" through indecision and apathy, but realize that "we all live together and those of us who love and know live so most."<sup>1</sup>

James, however, would have been far less virulent in his observations on the limitations of the aesthetic sense than Kierkegaard and Krutch had he ventured to confront the issue squarely in a philosophical treatise. He valued the artistic imagination insofar as it gave pleasure, in itself, and in its indirect benefit of instructing our tastes and sharpening the powers of perception. He would readily agree with Herbert Read that art, which is too often "cursorily treated as an ornament of civilization," is, in fact, "a vital activity, an energy of the senses that must continually convert the dead rain of matter into radiant images of life."<sup>2</sup> Yet, art remains primarily "of the senses" and not of the more profound understanding which must wrestle with life's too frequent calamities. It is magnificent as it

<sup>1</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>Herbert Read, Icon and Idea: The Function of Art in the Development of Human Consciousness (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 140.

refreshes and revitalizes the human spirit, but, by itself, it cannot guide. In James's words, "life without art" is a condition which "can find its own account," but "art without life . . . is a poor affair altogether."<sup>1</sup>

Like Krutch, James evidenced a preference, in his fiction, for characters and events which defined, not "mild" and "detached" or "sentimentally pious" topics,<sup>2</sup> but predominantly "the free, the large, the human . . . the fundamental, the passionate things."<sup>3</sup> Like Kierkegaard, he strove to depict "the individual vision of decency, the critical as well as the passionate judgment of it under sharp stress." (AN 93) The aesthetic imagination, in James's view, inspired the onlooker, reawakened him to the overly categorized, material world, and supplied keen insights into order and idea through selective form and metaphor; but the imagination of intrapersonal relationship--the bridge of kinship between man and man--discloses the fact that, for the artist in the world of his own devising as well as for the private citizen in the world at large, "It is as difficult to describe an action without glancing at its motive, its moral history, as it is to describe a motive without glancing at its practical consequence."<sup>4</sup> The society of man is

<sup>1</sup>Future of the Novel, p. 105.      <sup>2</sup>Krutch, p. 113.

<sup>3</sup>The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup>Future of the Novel, p. 105.

intelligible only through the infinite subterranean reasons it discloses to the searching eye and the sympathetic heart. Only those who are "saturated with life"<sup>1</sup> as "the most penetrated and most penetrating"<sup>2</sup> participants in the human drama can pierce through the "fatal futility of fact," (AN 122) that dead wall of mere baubles and commodities for the immoderate aesthete and the preoccupied businessman, and come to intelligent and compassionate grips with the "blinding" threat of "sorrow and suffering."<sup>3</sup>

Before I proceed, however, one important observation must be made. The formulations of Krutch and Kierkegaard, as well as the corresponding comments from James, must not be construed as petty ethical panaceas or as preludes to restrictive tenets. Rather, they are broad attempts to define the moral act, intellectually and emotionally, in terms of its external human environment and within the depths of a single, responsible soul. As such, they are consistent with the perspective James developed in his fiction where he concentrated, not upon sermons, but upon the "intense perceiver" (AN 71) in the act of perception and upon his attempts at knowledge and his "feeling for the human relation."<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, we may pursue an investigation

<sup>1</sup>The James Family, p. 331.

<sup>2</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 398.

<sup>3</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I, p. 101.

<sup>4</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 225.

of the moral sense, "the south slope"<sup>1</sup> of the creative intelligence, through additional evaluations of the fictional works. For this purpose, we shall address our attention to three short novels, The Sacred Fount, What Maisie Knew, and The Spoils of Poynton.

The nameless narrator of The Sacred Fount, appears, upon initial contact with his story, to have, as Tony Tanner suggests, the observant and inventive mind of a trained artist.<sup>2</sup> He seems to satisfy the Jamesian criterion of responsiveness "to the faintest hints of life" which "converts the very pulses of the air into revelations."<sup>3</sup> With a closer reading and sober reflection, however, the quality of the narrator's intellect and the veracity of his "revelations" come into serious question. Readers have responded variously to the problem and, in the sum of their contradictory views, erected quite a lively controversy over the true nature--the impression his creator intended him to make--of this unidentified storyteller. A few critics regard the narrator

<sup>1</sup>The James Family, p. 576.

<sup>2</sup>Tanner flatly states that "the narrator epitomizes the artistic instinct for James" ("Henry James's Subjective Adventurer: 'The Sacred Fount'," Essays and Studies, 16 (1963); rpt. in Lyall H. Powers, ed. Henry James's Major Novels: Essays in Criticism (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1973), p. 225].

<sup>3</sup>Future of the Novel, p. 12.



as a paragon of James's concept of "grasping" artistry,<sup>1</sup> while others evade the issue by dismissing the entire novel as a short story which had overextended itself and, thereby, forfeited any hope of coherence.<sup>2</sup> Both these arguments, in this writer's opinion, are mistaken. The novel is full of clues which establish exactly, it seems to me, where the "narrator-observer" stood with the author of his fanciful odyssey. These hints accumulate, in a manner reflected by the paragraphs of exposition which follow, to make a strong case against the narrator's reliability as a witness to his own adventure.

The tale revolves around an unusual theory of human behavior which assumes that, in every close relationship between two people, a parasitical process results. One member drains the other of a certain life-force, "taps the sacred fount"<sup>3</sup> of its victim's spirit, as it were, and becomes

<sup>1</sup>After relating many contrasting critical estimates of the novel's value and the narrator's veracity, Oscar Cargill finally concludes that the narrator is "obsessed." Among the arguments he summarizes, however, is Wilson Follett's opinion that the narrator of The Sacred Fount is "Henry James himself" [The Novels of Henry James (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961), p. 286].

<sup>2</sup>Leon Edel puts forth this viewpoint in his article, "The Sacred Fount," which originally appeared as an introduction to the following edition of the novel: The Sacred Fount (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1953). Edel's critique is reprinted in Lyall H. Powers, ed., Henry James's Major Novels: Essays in Criticism, p. 221.

<sup>3</sup>Henry James, The Sacred Fount (1901); rpt. in Henry James: Three Novels (New York: A Perennial Classic, Harper Row, 1968), p. 333.

stronger in the quality extracted as the host-body grows proportionately weaker. The narrator is directed, early on, toward two supposed applications of his eccentric hypothesis. One such connection has allegedly sprung up between Gilbert Long, whom the narrator had previously thought "an ass" and a mere "piece of human furniture" (SF 318) and a lady of mystery whom he finally identifies as May Server--a gadabout whose name, at least, is quite appropriate for a human offering. Almost simultaneous with this discovery, the narrator is put upon the trail of another cannibalistic relationship in the marriage of Guy and Grace Brissenden. Of the first pair, Long has somehow "changed for the better" and become "a clever and critical man" instead of the dolt the narrator had earlier taken him for. At the same time, the narrator believes he detects an antithetical transformation in Mrs. Server, a widow who had formerly been "delightfully handsome . . . markedly responsive and charming" (SF 324), but now, to all appearances, seems "a little helpless and vague." (SF 326) Of the second couple, our unrelenting theorist makes (with help) the observation that Mrs. Briss, a woman "of two or three and forty" whom he had long considered "plain," was, as he renews acquaintance with her on the train to Newmarch, a country resort and their common destination, markedly "prettier" (SF 319) and more vigorous than he had remembered. Not surprisingly, "poor Briss," her husband and many years her junior, "looks," to the narrator,

"quite sixty." (SF 328) Drawing his "proof" together, the narrator concludes that two concurrent cases of social vampirism are unraveling in his proximity. Among his "little gallery" of human specimens, Mr. Long is draining Mrs. Server of "intellect" (SF 322), and the Brissendens have accomplished, all unconsciously, a transfer of youth and sexual energy. Having once achieved this formula, the nameless experimenter tries mightily to shape all subsequent facts to fit it.

It is, perhaps, unnecessary to relate, in any great detail, the intricate mental gyrations and feverish flights of fancy which the narrator performs to protect and advance his "precious theory." (SF 410) Suffice it to say that he soon grows tired of mere private speculation which, even if erroneous, might have proved harmless enough as secret entertainment, and decides to follow his scheme into active interference with the lives around him. Convinced that his theory must be valid, due to his obviously "superior" insight and "intenser apprehensions" (SF 389), this privileged mover of the animate "pieces" in his "collection" (SF 374) decides, in a moment of "extraordinary tenderness" to save the victims from their damaging attachments.

Through a series of indirect comments and manipulated rendezvous, he hopes to throw Guy and May together, thereby breaking up a marriage and a suspected affair. In the narrator's mind, these unclean associations have no right to

exist, whatever their participants feel. His grand design becomes so "obsessive" (SF 329), and his paranoid suspicions of a "dim community" of collusion on the part of the clever cannibals so imperative, (SF 410) that the entire company of guests, fearful of being waylaid and confided in, give him a wide berth. (SF 414) The narrator, naturally, attributes this to the unfortunate fact of other "people's density" and his own obvious "penetrability." (SF 371) He becomes so visibly agitated that Mrs. Briss and Ford Obert, a portrait painter, grow concerned for his sanity. (SF 493+435)

Finally, confronted by Mrs. Brissenden, who scoffs at the incredible "system" she had, unwittingly, helped instill in his mind, the narrator is forced to abandon his constructions. Mrs. Brissenden has armed herself with more comprehensive facts, and speaks with a conviction that even our meddling hero cannot ignore. According to her information, May Server is every bit as alert as ever and at loose ends, casting about for a man. (SF 359) Gilbert Long, moreover, has been, all the while, in the throes of an affair with Lady John, not the much-pitied May. What is more, he is, as Mrs. Briss insists, as stupid as he ever was. (SF 479) Even more disconcertingly, the supposedly haggard and unconscious Guy has been the source of his wife's information, exhibiting a lively and thorough curiosity of his own that not only rivals the narrator's a priori formula, but surpasses it in accuracy. The narrator, convinced that his own "demonstration" shows more "method" (SF 493), but forced to admit that

his antagonist's evidence fits together better and that her "tone" of certainty is matchless, does what he had repeatedly threatened to do whenever his system had come upon obstacles in the past. He packs his bags and runs.

The "flower" of the narrator's "theory" (SF 404) is an even more wild and ungainly growth than his alarmed companions might suspect. His monomania is, to begin with, for one so "original" and "magnificently aware" while "everyone else was benightedly out of it" (SF 414), founded, suspiciously, on borrowed perceptions. Ironically, Mrs. Briss broaches the topic of Long's seeming improvement, while Long casually mentions Mrs. Briss's surprising handsomeness, as the narrator converses with each, alternately and in separate compartments, on the train to Newmarch. Unable to label any of the fine animals in his human menagerie by himself, he is likewise put upon the trail of Mrs. Server, the victim required to make his brace of predators complete, by a suggestion, from Ford Obert, that she was "different" and that "there's something the matter with her." (SF 350)

Secondly, this great theorist, who is almost totally dependent upon secondhand evaluations with which to lay the foundations of his idee fixe, shows no intellectual flexibility or discernment in applying the processes of the social vampirism he thinks he sees. Mechanically, he imposes the deleterious effects of the Brissenden relationship, which supposedly works the transfer of sexual vitality from husband

to wife, upon the conjectural liaison between Gilbert Long and May Server. This latter couple, however, are thought to relate to one another as pupil to teacher. Instead of youth, they exchange perspicacity, a process which is usually mutually enrichening. The narrator obviously does not have the experience nor the wisdom to differentiate between these two relationships, so different in kind and in properties shared. Whatever can be said to support the theory of physical transformation through marriage, the activity of teaching, when the pupil is responsible and grows increasingly apt, invigorates rather than diminishes the mind. In his eagerness to applaud his "own wizardry" and work with living flesh as "plastic wax in hand" (SF 388), the central figure fails to examine closely the first principles of his "priceless pearl of inquiry." (SF 481) He tries to derive the same formula from two unlike reactions.

Thirdly, for all his self-deceptive rhetoric about "the best interests of the others" and (revealing phrase) a "moral attachment to . . . one's prey" (SF 368), the narrator is concerned only with "the sublime success" of his "strained vision." (SF 423) Full of uneasy "scruples" at the outset, (SF 402) he finally rationalizes his uninvited "intimacy" (SF 359) and interference in others' lives by invoking powerful paternal instincts; he has the right to "worry" and intercede "on behalf of those (he) cares for." (SF 415) Yet, when his "house of" ruminative "cards" (SF 461) comes

tumbling down in the whirlwind of Mrs. Briss's revelations, the narrator is anything but pleased that his hypothetical victims have escaped their dreadful fate. Instead, he fervently wishes that Guy and May had been drained and bled so that he might know "the beauty of having been right." (SF 481) People are but "grist to the mill" (SF 425) of his desire to be "a painter of my state" and produce "a beautiful picture" of the imperious working of his will in the medium of life itself. (SF 388)

The narrator wants desperately to be creative and feel "the artistic glow" (SF 374) within his breast. Yet, he meets none of the conditions for constructive artistry. He is not intelligent enough to know he has not all the answers and he knows himself too little to realize that the answers he does have are full of misconceptions. His postulations, being derivative and "destitute of material clues" (SF 353), gradually lose, in his concurrent desire to protect them and exploit the amusement in "an attempt to be a providence" (SF 414), any semblance with actuality. He comes to correlate the "intoxicating" atmosphere of his perceptual agitation with the world "of fairy tales and . . . childish imaginations of the impossible." (SF 387) As he moves, however, from an urge to understand the realities of human behavior to a desire to float in subjective, autonomous suppositions, the questions naturally arise as to why and how an articulate and apparently sophisticated middle-aged

man could and would want to reside in "an old tale" or a "castle of enchantment." (SF 388) Fortunately, Henry James, in his thoroughness, exposes not only the symptoms of his register's aberrations, but also provides, in subtle disclosures, the origins of their perversity.

The narrator abandons himself to "an abyss of connections" during his stay at Newmarch, which is, in his view at least, an exclusive estate (SF 408), because he feels, unconsciously, that he must compensate for a dull everyday life and, by his own admission, "a niggardly past." (SF 387) He can devote all his time and attention to holiday diversions because, unlike more worldly men, his "affairs," taken in the double sense of romantic intrigues or business matters, are "used to his neglect" (SF 366) and all but nonexistent. The "blankness" of his "London life" (SF 423) and his latent feelings of stagnation underscore his disorientation during his hour of "glamour" and "splendour" within the "halls of art and fortune." (SF 402)

Finally, the narrator, in his woeful ignorance of himself and the personal voids that goad him on, constitutes the only documented case of genuine "social vampirism" within the novel.<sup>1</sup> His theories have seemed to prosper, in his own fancy, on "amazingly little evidence" (SF 425), but the multiple proofs he unsuspectingly provides with regard to his

<sup>1</sup> [In a letter, James once alluded to the "favorite and fatal vampires" who "burdened consciousness" by pressing upon the poor soul who already had too many social obligations to attend to. In this he spoke primarily in jest; in The Sacred Fount, with regard to the narrator, at least, his portrayal



own parasitism are irrefutable. Having little life of his own, he lives vicariously by feeding on the emotional entanglements of others. The narrator corresponds to a special category of the Gnostic precept that confuses life with art. He not only values "method" above the merits of accuracy in any search for meaning, (SF 493) he also assumes, in his childish egoism, that his posture of absolute artist in life allows him the same dispensations of his materials, living flesh and actual events, that the artist of life--who incorporates representative, rather than real, scenes from life and conjoins them with messages and moods which are, as he knows, only infinitesimal parts of the infinite whole of truth--is permitted in the application of paint or ink. Neglecting only the rights, feelings, awarenesses and combined wisdom of everyone else, he presumes to play God. His presumptions are immoral because they recognize no loci of responsibility outside himself. He is a pitiful, but alarming figure who, as his own words attest, (and whose ironic double-entendre he is immune to) belongs in an "asylum of the finer wit." (SF 370)

The plot of What Maisie Knew hinges, not upon the misadventures of an artist manqué, but upon the progress of a young and very neglected girl as she struggles toward womanhood. Maisie Parange, the heroine of the piece, is the

of "vampirism" is in deadly earnest (The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I, p. 158).

unfortunate offspring of two of the most unmitigated oafs in the Jamesian canon. Beale and Ida Farange, who are divorced shortly after the novel opens, have scarcely a redeeming feature aside from their comparative youth. Both are narrow, ignorant, faithless and self-centered. Ida is a flirt and a gadabout, while Beale is a wastrel and a rake. They also share a criminal indifference toward their daughter, who, for a few years, is shuttled back and forth between parental houses and governesses like a badminton bird. It is during the travail of these many passages, however, that Maisie first shows signs of a dignity and acumen which far outweigh any combination of these qualities in her father and mother. Beale and Ida, who consider Maisie primarily a burden, agree to share custody of her, partly out of fear of public opinion, but chiefly because, through simultaneous paroxysms of pettiness, they view her as a mobile sounding board upon which to vent and convey their hate and resentment for one another. The little girl is equal to this scheme, however, and better than the basest instincts of her parents, for she feigns stupidity and employs long bouts of silence in order to avoid bearing such messages.<sup>1</sup>

Their vindictive seeds having fallen on obviously barren ground, the unworthy parents return to their trivial

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, What Maisie Knew (1897; rpt. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Anchor Books, 1954), p. 28.

pastimes, and abandon the child to surrogate-mothers in the form of inept and/or callous nurses and tutors. Thus, Maisie, in a caldron of conflicting emotions and impressions, wishing to love and be loved and wondering why she was not, was called upon "to see much more than she at first understood," and, worse, "to understand much more than any little girl . . . had perhaps understood before." (WMK 23) Only a small portion of the caprice and complication with which she had to contend is related in this brief outline of contact with her parents. Her formative trials begin only after they have set her virtually adrift in the nominal care of two informal guardians, one, Mrs. Wix, who is ill-equipped to instruct and the other, Miss Overmore, who is disinclined to love.

Pretty, young and profoundly conceited, Miss Overmore, who is originally hired by Ida, treats Maisie with perfunctory politeness, and, initially, before she has manipulated her way into a position with a higher standing than governess, gives the girl casual, rudimentary lessons in history and government. Maisie is but a stepping-stone in the career of her instructress, however. Soon after Miss Overmore catches Beale's attention, she catches Beale, becoming first his mistress and then his new wife. After gaining such illustrious status, her little pretext need no longer be cultivated, and Maisie becomes as totally ignored by the new Mrs. Farange as she had been by the old.

In the void created by Overmore's defection, a replacement, Mrs. Wix, is retained by Ida. Old, plain, and

uneducated, Mrs. Wix does, at least, have a heart and soon begins to lavish attention on Maisie, whom she sees as a substitute for her own (possibly fictitious) daughter, Clara Matilda, who had supposedly been killed in an accident years earlier. This excitable lady has a lurid imagination which is fed by "swarms of stories" about "magic or monsters" with themes "about love and beauty and countesses and wickedness." (WMK 37) Such fare, aside from an occasional dose of Victorian "decency," comprises Mrs. Wix's sole contribution to the formation of her young charge's mind. Still, Wix plays an important part in Maisie's education, for she touches the girl's heart, "a spot that had never even yet been reached." (WMK 34) The two become fast friends, which is fortunate, for Maisie needs a friend to cling to through the waves of adult faithlessness that are about to assault her young consciousness.

The shifting patterns of allegiance among the little girl's numerous "parents" (she must try to make up in quantity for what she does not receive in quality) can be most economically and intelligibly reported in outline form. The new Mrs. Beale and her husband, their ardor having worn thin, begin to have serious spats. Meanwhile, free-wheeling Ida meets and marries a young nobleman, Sir Charles. Beale leaves his second wife and takes up with a rich, ugly Countess and eventually accompanies her to America. Ida separates from Sir Charles, choosing, finally, from among

her many admirers, a sheep rancher with whom she intends to run off to South Africa. (WMK 176) Sir Charles and Mrs. Beale, in the interim, find a fund of attraction in one another and set up housekeeping. This latter couple informally adopt Maisie, partly to establish a respectable alibi for their liaison and absolve themselves of frivolous motives before the court--where a labyrinthine lawsuit, "Farange vs. Farange and others" (WMK 237) is in progress--and partly because Sir Charles has developed a genuine liking for his stepdaughter. Maisie has found a second friend in this good-natured, inconsequent man whose weakness for the female form is matched only by his fear of the tongues that come with the willful women he attaches himself to. (WMK 207) Maisie returns his innocent, if somewhat ineffectual and inconsistent affection, and enjoys her walks with him to places of historic interest and to dry lectures--attended in accordance with a haphazard scheme to "improve her mind"--where Maisie pays more attention to "the rows of faces thrust out like empty jugs" (WMK 137) than to the many "subjects" being discussed.

Events proceed in this course for some time, until the day finally arrives when Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale, convinced that public opinion is in their favor and that the protracted lawsuit is about to censure the heinous behavior of Ida and Beale (WMK 167), decide to bolt for the coast of France and a new life together. Mrs. Wix and Maisie complete

the company. Wix, however, finds, after an heroic effort, that she cannot abide the "vile" (WMK 223) relationship obtaining between the unmarried stepparents (WMK 273). Sir Charles, on the other hand, who is still drawn by lust and "hopeless . . . fear" (WMK 267) to Mrs. Beale, cannot, although he wishes to stay with Maisie, break away from his adulterous affair. Maisie must choose to return to England with the old governess or remain in France with Charles, who is, to her, a heady combination of older brother and first beau. In "cold terror" at the prospect of leaving this man (WMK 262), she nevertheless decides to accompany Mrs. Wix.

Maisie has chosen to reward loyalty with loyalty. Her decision, based not on personal preference, but on an instinctive evaluation of which of her friends needs her most, is a deeply moral one. She has not understood the forces governing the erratic conduct of the "grown-ups" in her life--the ruthless avarice of her father; the restless vanity of her "natural" mother; the concupiscence of Sir Charles; and the relentless opportunism of Miss Overmore/Mrs. Beale--because these appetites have not yet awakened fully in her own person. Still, she has judged on the basis of the impression of worth, the amount of genuine affection and the degree of reliability, inherent in the attitudes and actions directed her way. Most of all, she has judged in conformity with the "ethical spirit" that Kierkegaard advocates and the realization, which simply is

or is not an outgrowth of one's constitution, that life is a serious matter and that one's actions raise ripples of consequence in the destinies of other people. She has learned this in the urgency of her own deep need of affection and through the sympathy she lavishes upon those few who administer to that need.

She has also learned sobriety in instinctive reaction to the world of moral chaos surrounding her, where the adults on whom she had every right to depend for direction, are completely absorbed, for the most part, in their own whims and passions. She alone, out of the entire company--Wix's morality being a volatile amalgam of philistine principles and melodramatic awe of the wages of sin and Sir Charles' commiseration being, at best, a rather scattershot and tepid quality--possess what Henry James, in his Preface to this novel, calls "the moral seed." (AN 43) Likewise, she alone gives promise of becoming, as she begins to wrestle with the isolating urges that beset her companions and is reinforced in her emerging powers of rational choice by the surges of ethical anarchy she has witnessed, a prime example of the Jamesian belief that "virtue" can only be "absolutely independent, individual and lonely."<sup>1</sup>

The Spoils of Poynton, fittingly enough, provides a confrontation between the two primary "types" delineated in

<sup>1</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I, p. 270.

two novels discussed thus far; the despotic, "aesthetic" outlook defined by Krutch and illustrated by the narrator in The Sacred Fount, and the open and dutiful viewpoint posited by Kierkegaard and embodied by Maisie Farange. Mrs. Gareth, the votary of art, is less ambitious than the narrator of The Sacred Fount as a theorist and as an appropriator of suitable materials, but even more free than he in her readiness to impinge upon and arrange other lives to her taste. Her "genius for composition"<sup>1</sup> does not incorporate a curiosity about mankind's motives, but confines itself to beautiful, old French and Italian furnishings of the kind, "supreme in every part" (SP 161), which grace Poynton, her family estate. In her narrow, aesthetic "fanaticism" she reveres these lovely items as "living things" (SP 167) and, indeed, as the only "beings" in life entitled to exertions of "conscience" and "sympathy." (SP 167) People she regards, in the main, with "cynical" contempt as the source of all the horrors "she could secretly suffer from ugliness and stupidity." (SP 149) In her distorted perceptions and misplaced affections, Mrs. Gareth (like the narrator of The Sacred Fount) treats her fellow creatures as mere "articles of human furniture" (AN 346) to be shoved around and variously positioned,

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, The Spoils of Poynton (1896); rpt. in Henry James: Three Novels (New York: A Perennial Classic, Harper & Row, 1968), p. 196.



as we shall see, for the benefit of her beloved "things." Her moral sense, in other words, is topsy-turvy; for she has come to equate human beings with objects, items of utility like overstuffed sofas to be noticed only "on the side she bumped against" (SP 234), and thinks of her furnishings as living companions.

Her opposite number, and Maisie's counterpart as an intense and responsible agent in this novel, is a young woman named Fleda Vetch. Significantly, Fleda is not Mrs. Gareth's detractor, but the one person whom the older lady considers an ally through most of their mutual history. Fleda, like the "fierce" (SP 161) Mrs. Gareth, has an educated taste of her own, shaped and instructed by the lessons in painting she has taken in France. (SP 156) To her older friend's delight, Fleda, once she is introduced to them, also has a deep and lasting admiration for the "relics and rarities" of Poynton. (SP 161) Convinced, in short, that Fleda is much like herself (SP 167), Mrs. Gareth soon begins to suspect that the "reserved" and appreciative girl would make a perfect daughter-in-law, or a better one, at least, than the "blank," athletic girl her son, Owen, has recently proposed to. (SP 226) The intricate maneuverings of Mrs. Gareth in her attempt to throw Owen and Fleda together, and Fleda's equally determined resistances to that imperious "artist's" (SP 198) grand designs, form a major portion of the novel's plot--an involved story whose terse unravelling

will disclose, among other things, that Fleda contains much more than the sum of Mrs. Gareth's talents and sensitivities and, thereby, avoids many of that lady's shortcomings.

The plot of the novel unfolds in something like the following manner. Adela Gareth and Fleda Vetch meet at the "hideous" home of Mona Brigstock, the muscular, pretty girl who is engaged to Owen. Mrs. Gareth, who spies in Fleda a kindred spirit, manages to convey to her new friend, who also bemoans the garishness of the bride's home, (SP 151) that the impending nuptials can only be "repulsive" to a mother whose sense of beauty could not overlook the fact that the prospective bride had none. Mona was "tainted". (SP 157) She "would never do" because she could not, as an empty "oddity" (SP 239) fill the role of "walking catalogue" and "custodian" in the "ministration to rare pieces" which Adela demands of any daughter-in-law and future mistress of Poynton. (SP 239). Owen, meanwhile, "absolutely beautiful and delightfully dense" (SP 154), is outside, "laughing and even romping" in blissful ignorance with his equally obtuse intended.

Before long, Mrs. Gareth, who has noted Fleda's tendency to defend Owen in conversation, devises a set of battle tactics in the hope of deposing the despised Mona. The disclosure of that plan, however, must await a few prefatory remarks. England, at this time, and until the year 1925, still followed the principle of primogeniture in

the assignment of property rights. Having reached his majority two years earlier, Owen was now the legal owner of Poynton and the sole authority as to its apportionment. He has, moreover, already promised the house, and its valuable contents, to Mona as a condition of their marriage. Miss Brigstock may not be a connoisseur, but she has a jealous "love of possessions" (SP 176) and sets great store by the acquisition of this considerable property. Mrs. Gareth, therefore, schemes, not out of maternal concern for the welfare of her wayward son, but in order to save her very life and her furniture, "all her old loves and patiences." (SP 183)

When Adela quits Poynton, preparatory to the young couple's arrival, and takes up residence at Ricks, the former home of a maternal aunt which remains in the family, she simply, and illegally, carts all her precious things with her. She knows Owen will be upset and Mona mortified. She counts on the marriage being postponed. Owen will be sent to negotiate and pliable Fleda will be his mother's mediator. In this way, Mrs. Gareth foresees, the "right" girl will be thrown together with her boy and, if things develop as planned, a new love for Fleda will replace Owen's current involvement. A much more advantageous wedding will then ensue, pairing Fleda with her son and restoring, in effect, Poynton to its creator and spiritual owner.

Up to a point, Adela's machinations are quite effective and her prognostications accurate. The nateful marriage

is delayed, Owen and Fleda do meet and consult and they do fall in love with one another. This manipulative woman's calculations are doomed to failure, however, because they are based on her false estimation of Fleda as a younger copy of herself. This, as the reader presently discovers, is a serious underestimation of the novel's heroine.

Fleda is not merely expedient in her relations with others, and unlike Adela "her taste" was not "her life."

(SP 163) She is dismayed by her friend's highhanded treatment of Owen and the obvious contempt for his feelings and rights implied in the arrogant despoliation of Poynton.

(SP 197) Moreover, affections are not, for Fleda, an excuse for overbearance. She wants Owen in his totality, honor and integrity intact, instead of just his physical presence. In her first flush of sympathy for him and indignation at his mother's presumption, she endeavors to intercede on his behalf and to try to talk Adela out of her stubborn piracy of the furnishings. Knowing Mrs. Gareth's plan, Fleda must hide her feelings for Owen lest his mother be encouraged by signs that her design was working. (SP 219) Later, upon discovering that Owen reciprocates her love, Fleda begins to play something of "a hideous double game." (SP 227) She still pretends indifference to Owen in his mother's company and advises him, in his impatience, to break with Mona, to be true to his word and not "abandon" the girl. (SP 256) Yet, she begins, secretly, to count on Mrs. Gareth's

obstinacy and to hope that Mona will call the wedding off. Just when victory seems assured, however, Mrs. Gareth, overconfident in her own tactics and unaware of Fleda's scruples, sends the furniture back to Poynton. Immediately, Mona is appeased, the marriage takes place and the fondest aspirations of Adela, Fleda and Owen are washed away.

Although touched by the contagion of Mrs. Gareth's imperious artistry, Fleda tries desperately to be fair to all the parties concerned in the double triangle--drawn in conflicting motives between the furniture of Poynton, Mrs. Gareth and all the straining young lovers--which defines the boundaries of her movements through the novel's pages. She is torn between the dictates of heart and conscience and, consequently, embroiled in an occasion of anguish and conflict which, with a little less fastidiousness or a little more consistency on her part, might have been effectively smoothed over. Yet, if she is, as James declares, "not distinctively able" (AN 131) and not altogether up to a sublime objectivity of thought and conduct, she is, all the same, a "lamp" of "intelligence" in a human environment where "every one else shows for comparatively stupid." (AN 129) She is not quite strong enough to renounce completely her selfish desire for Owen, yet she is clearly above a ruthless war of emotions in order to wrest him, at any cost, from her "enemy". (SP 211) Unlike Mrs. Gareth, Fleda confronts life with more enthusiasms than a single, obsessive "passion for beauty." (SP 192) Adela has eyes

only for her lovely objects and "no perception of" or interest in "anybody's nature." (SP 234) Fleda, on the other hand, has a curiosity about other people which is more than incidental. She imaginatively participates in their being and feels their "suffering" (SP 179), their side of the matter, as keenly as she feels her own. Naturally, this multifaceted participation in life makes thinking more complicated and action more difficult. Still this ability, as James puts it, to "see" as well as to "feel" (AN 129) exposes our mistakes and helps us learn from them. Most of all, however, Fleda, for all her indecision and erratic behavior, offers a positive contrast to Adela Gareth in a sincere effort to balance her own desires with the desires of others. Her imagination, like Maisie's, has two chambers, and she is richer, not merely made righteous and certainly not made infallible, by responding to others as sources of wonderment and opportunities for instruction rather than opaque articles to be placed like gaming pieces on the matrix of an intractable will to arrange life. The "thick, colored air" of her receptive and "subtle mind" remains Fleda's "only treasure" (SP 155), and proves far more resilient and imperishable than the spoils of Poynton.

Maisie Farange and Fleda, as well as the narrator of The Sacred Fount and Mrs. Gareth, are not only active contributors to their own particular tales and suitable thematic foils in terms of the concept of moral seriousness

set forth in this chapter, they are also conductors for the alternating currents of an ethical stance which pervades the whole of James's fiction. This attitude or position, embraced wholeheartedly by the "positive" Jamesian characters from Isabel Archer to Maggie Verver and defied by "negative" forces as dissimilar as Gibert Osmond and Fanny Assingham, can be best summarized, perhaps, by a tenet James proposed in a letter to William Dean Howells. It reads as follows: "We don't know what people might give us that they don't--the only thing is to take them on what they do and to allow them absolutely and utterly their conditions."<sup>1</sup> This axiom of nonintrusion, which precludes any impulse to manipulate, with misguided artistry, the lives of our fellow creatures, has also been noted by two attentive critics, William H. Gass and Dorothy Van Ghent.<sup>2</sup> These two, distilling the principle of non-intervention from James's novels, rather than from his correspondence, both liken their discovery to Kant's second postulation of his categorical imperative, which is quoted immediately below:

. . . so act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The James Family, p. 507.

<sup>2</sup>From Van Ghent's article, "The Portrait of a Lady," and Gass's "The High Brutality of Good Intentions" (Discussions of Henry James, pp. 53 and 90, respectively).

<sup>3</sup>Immanuel Kant, "The Moral Law - The Categorical Imperative," rpt. in Gerald F. Kreyche and Jesse A. Mann, eds. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1966), p. 213.

Yet, for all the soundness of this advice, Kant's postulate and James's tenet remain rules, posited abstractly and applicable only as a priori precepts rather than having a "basis" in and arising directly from "experience."<sup>1</sup> They are, therefore, dangerously close to the practice of "pedantics," or the manifestations of "the conscious conscience," (AB 124) which were "anathema" to the mind of Henry James. Furthermore, the tendency to confront experience with an arsenal of admonitions seems, regardless how good one's intentions, to invite the peril of holding life away by the long arm of doctrine. James, fortunately, was aware of this impasse, and refused to transform his fear of meddling into an artificially justified excuse for non-participation in life. One should keep alert and resist the temptation to "live others' lives for them," but, at the same time, one ought to maintain "a contributive and participant view" of people. (AN 130) The manner of taking an active part in the human drama can be suitably conveyed by quoting from another letter, this one directed to A. C. Benson in April, 1914. James declares:

I don't think we see anything, about our friends, unless we see all--so far as in us lies, and there is surely no care we can so take for them as to turn our mind upon them liberally.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> The Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 364.



We can avoid interference and isolation at the same time, then, by redirecting our goals and making our human counterparts, rather than an appeasement of appetite or competitive desires for personal prominence, the proper object of study and effort. We must undergo, by simultaneously seeing and feeling, the essences of others before we may plot the course of our own conduct through the confusing maze of selfish urges and impersonal edicts. The resulting morality of imagination, which registers, in visceral anguish and delight, the actuality of other men, while invigorating and readjusting the categories and directives of the mind, has no basis except in experience. This posture of creative response, at once an amalgam of emotional commitment and intellectual objectivity, is fraught with risk. It denies the security of mere conformity to conventional codes, while it exposes the imprisonments imposed by the varieties of rapacity.

In the three novels just discussed, we have seen how the thirst for omniscience, the artistry of personal profit, acts to sever the ties of mutual respect and the delicate rites of homage among men. In Henri Bergson's The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, we are provided alternatives to the "theories and presumptions" which, in James's opinion, "muffle" (AB 125) the attempts at interaction and understanding between man and man. Such censorious and monolithic figures as Mrs. Newsome, Mr. Waymarsh the

American lawyer, Mr. Leavenworth (who is imprisoned within his jingoistic ideals), Mr. Wentworth, Mrs. Lowder and, to a lesser degree, Mrs. Wix and Julia Darrow are indicted and, in part, explained by Bergson's distinction between a "static" and a "dynamic" morality. The first approach "exists . . . at a given moment in a given society; it has become ingrained in customs, ideas and institutions."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, when the intellect, the reason alone, comes to bear upon this societal superstructure of mores it produces an ethical system, better organized and internally consistent, but just as lifeless as the arbitrary whole from which it sprang; "a purely intellectualist philosophy which can only proffer advice and adduce reasons which are perfectly free to combat with other reasons."<sup>2</sup> The second type of morality is more difficult to elucidate, but, at the same time, proportionately more valuable than the "static." By "creative effort," it overcomes "habit" and layers of "unexamined moral acquisition."<sup>3</sup> It envisions an "open society" and "embraces all humanity," one being at a time, by responding, as fully as possible, to every individual as "a new species,"<sup>4</sup> a unique entity, full of mystery, and begging for exploration.

<sup>1</sup>Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, (1932); 2nd ed. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton, trans. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1935), p. 269.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 311.

One of the best illustrations in fiction, outside the works of Henry James, of the ethics that result from an imaginative participation in the lives of others is provided by Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Two episodes in particular from this novel are useful in depicting first, the preferability of empathy to the lures of personal gain, and second, the ways in which a comprehensive moral decision, spun out of the soul and a full consciousness, transcends the easy adherence to the decrees of social custom.

Our initial example finds Huck and Jim, the runaway slave, about to embark upon one of the many adventures they find as they float down the Mississippi on their raft. They have just discovered the "Walter Scott," a steamship that has run aground on a sandbar in the middle of the river. Drawing near the wrecked vessel, and seeing no signs of life aboard, they climb onto her deck in the hope of finding a little "honest loot."<sup>1</sup> Huck is cautiously exploring the craft when, to his horror, he discovers, through snatches of overheard conversation, that he has unruly company. There are three men aboard, and their talk reveals them as conspirators in a plot to scuttle the ship for the purpose of plundering her after the other passengers have fled. Two of the criminals are debating whether or not to kill the

<sup>1</sup>Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, rpt. in The Portable Mark Twain, intro. Bernard DeVoto (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p. 268.

third, whom they suspect of a loose tongue, when Huck decides he has heard enough and scurries back to find Jim and the raft. The raft, however, has, as Jim informs him, "done broke loose en gone."<sup>1</sup> Nothing if not resourceful, Huck manages to gain possession of the thieves' skiff, leaving the culprits to their doom on board a steamship that is rapidly breaking apart. Huck is grateful for his deliverance, but recognizes, with a pang of sympathy, that his safety has been secured at the expense of others, "hard lot" though they are: "I began to think how hard it was to be in such a fix. I says to myself, there ain't no telling but I might come to be a murderer myself yet, and then how would I like it."<sup>2</sup>

Huck is, in a sense, the "artist" of these villains' fate, but his victory of style and stealth gives him little satisfaction. He cannot share the small boat with men who would murder a comrade, much less complete strangers, but he would have welcomed such an option. Rather than gloating over his good fortune or finding ways to excuse himself (and many perfectly good excuses exist), Huck commiserates with the wretches on the basis of the humanity he holds in common and in spite of the exculpating fact that the doomed men have, in strict justice, condemned themselves.

The second relevant episode also finds Jim and Huck on their raft. They have reached the stage in their journey

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 274.

when they expect to come upon the mouth of the Ohio River, and the lights of nearby Cairo, Illinois, at any minute. Jim is beginning to rejoice in the imminent prospect of "freedom," speaking excitedly of working and saving to "buy" his wife and children, and Huck is growing more "mean and . . . miserable" with each passing second.<sup>1</sup> The boy is beginning to feel the weight of his own cultural conditioning. His "conscience . . . pinches" more and more painfully as the moment draws near when he must either bow to the proscriptions of his cultural heritage or flaunt those rules by abetting the escape of a slave who was, no matter how he "tried to make out to myself that I warn't to blame,"<sup>2</sup> another person's property. Staring his transgression full in the face, and knowing he "had done wrong," Huck measures the deeply felt facts of Jim's manhood--his eagerness to be free, his love for his family, and his profound gratitude for the boy's help--against the taboos of convention, and opts to follow his own conscience by keeping his covenant with the slave.

The fact that the pair have overshot Cairo in the nighttime fog and that any question of liberty for Jim is premature does not lessen the import of Huck's resolve. He has, in full knowledge of his sin and in humble acquiescence of "sickening" guilt, chosen in response to the laws of his being--his feeling for fair-play and his sense of compassion--

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

rather than the law of the land. He has not, like James's imperious artists in flesh, arrogated to himself, in the autonomy of subjective impulse, the right to blindly determine the fate of his fellow man; he has, instead, acted in the only vein where the dictates of his heart and mind converge. He has done, in total awareness and complete contrition, as he must, not as self-interest--either in the form of self-indulgent vagaries or mindless, comfortable conformity to established norms--might determine that he should.

This same, uneasy tension between what Leo Shestov, in an article on Tolstoy, calls the realm where men live "in their own particular world in their dreams" and the "world of . . . sense and science" which is "common to us all,"<sup>1</sup> is omnipresent in James's fiction and, in this critic's opinion, the most fundamental of all his thematic conflicts. James's central registers can be defined, aesthetically, by their unusual powers of observation and an almost insatiable desire to articulate, in fragments of speech or hesitant gestures, the gathering flood of their impressions. Morally, however, they must be judged by their capacity to recognize and remain poised between the two unworthy extremes of evasion and self-enclosure. The responsible creature cannot live entirely in

<sup>1</sup>Leo Shestov, "The Last Judgment: Tolstoy's Last Works," In Job's Balances, C. Coventry, trans. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1932); rpt. in Ralph E. Matlaw, ed. Tolstoy, A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth-Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 157.

the domain of his own desires, nor can he, if he wishes to remain awake and alive, escape to the rigidly defined worlds of impersonal law and dogma. The ultimate test of the moral imagination, for James, consisted in the success with which one balanced oneself between the tyranny of whim and the merciless scythe of principle. The wholly aesthetic outlook is possible only in the nature that unquestioningly identifies its own urges as absolute necessities. The person for whom subjective impulses have the force of law, and for whom no duty exists except to himself, sees other entities not as equals, but as means and rivals. The world is not, to him, a court of combined rights and common threats, but a pool of objects, squirming and still, which he must arrange to his own taste, if he can. His own "dreams" are his only reality.

At the opposite pole are the evaders, oversimplifiers and codifiers of life, the unrelenting moralists and unconscious conformers who attempt to curtail the variety of existence and the nuances of human interaction by subsuming their personalities, and all individuality, within unconditional ethical formulas and shortsighted patterns of social conduct which exclude "the love of life, the love of other persons and quickness of soul and sense" (AB 109) in their worship of one, sovereign profession, such as "business," or one milieu, such as the affluent, upper-middle class. These disciples of conventionality

try, in their hostility to any innovative quirk of thought or behavior, to eradicate the unique aspirations of disparate men by instituting tyrannies of compliance to the "common lots" of creed and class.

James's last three completed novels, The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl, reflect very graphically the struggles of their central characters to attain and/or acquire a dynamic morality--the sense of duty which merges a pragmatic, "realistic" disposition to self-preservation with an idealistic, "romantic" impulse to sacrifice--among all the predators, Philistines and puritans who jostle them as they wend their way. In effect, this confrontation involves the gradual initiation of the central reflector into the many possible applications of convention; the ways, for example, the predatory artist of self-interest uses standard patterns of social behavior to affect conformity while pursuing his exclusive purposes, and the ways in which the rigidly righteous and the smugly "normal" attempt to bury initiative in prejudice.

Before these final works are taken up, however, one word must be interjected as to procedure. Due to their length and intricacy, a plot summary of these last three novels will not be attempted. Instead, only those segments and character traits which are pertinent to the thrust of this study will be selected for representation and review.



Lambert Strether, the reader's chief guide and companion through the pages of The Ambassadors, has already received some critical attention in previous chapters of this work. This final, and more extensive analysis of his character will dwell upon the veracity and the implications of the insights and ideas which Strether gathers and constructs during his sojourn in Paris. Having already disclosed why he has left his comfortable America to come to this great, worldly city, it remains to discover how he fares once he gets settled into a new routine.

At the outset, Strether must be granted his attractive qualities. He is wildly curious and, as a "man of imagination" (AN 310), keenly impressed by the forms and the shibboleths of the mysterious society into which he plunges. In his awkwardness as an outsider, and in his regret at having been deprived of so many of life's pleasures, he is a poignant figure, deserving of sympathy. In his passionate insistence to little Bilham, an expatriate American painter living in Paris, that he must "keep an eye on the fleeting hour" and "live all you can" (Amb 134), many might find a measure of sagacity. Yet, for all his earnestness--revealed in the gentle pathos of his internal conflict between his official mission to reclaim a wayward young man to the old American verities and his private campaign to rediscover a sense of beauty and romance in Europe--and his expectations of "a new lease on life" upon being "smothered in

sensations" (Amb 119), Strether does not have the requisite experience or the wisdom to tether the balloons of fancy which his excitable mind sets flying. He is quickly "dazzled" by "the romance of glory" emitted by the museums he visits and the artists he enviously contemplates in Parisian salons. (Amb 181)

As he gradually renounces his lucrative association with Mrs. Newsome, and increasingly regrets the provincial, American bias which supplies "his odious inbred suspicion of any form of beauty," (Amb 119) he requires, more and more imperatively, an accurate understanding of the disconcertingly complex foreign society whose part he has taken. Strether has gambled much on his first impressions of the cultural struggle between the New World and the Old, and he, in his repressed romantic zeal, does not have the time or the detachment to form objective evaluations of the civilizations on either side of the Atlantic. Pressed by many conflicting motives, Strether

. . . relapsed into the sense that he himself was free to believe in anything that, from hour to hour, kept him going. He had motions and flutters of this conscious hour-to-hour kind, temporary surrenders to irony, to fancy, frequent instinctive snatches at the growing rose of observation . . . in which he could bury his nose even to wantonness. (Amb 281)

His "wantonness" can be gauged, to some extent, by his realizations, in brief moments of lucidity, that he was constantly at sea and incapable "of reaching the truth of anything." (Amb 178) Still, he feels compelled to "judge . . .

everything" (Amb 256) and everyone in this new and elusive world. Repeatedly, however, he is mistaken in his judgments. For example, the one relationship which he most needs to perceive correctly, the liaison between Madame de Vionnet and young Chad Newsome, is the one he misconstrues most thoroughly. He is long deceived into thinking that this aristocratic French lady, who appears "good" and fervently religious (Amb 181), is graciously molding the American heir into a gentleman and prospective husband for her daughter, Jeanne. (Amb 143) Strether is hardly prepared, in his misunderstanding of both participants, for the actual state of affairs (pun intended) that exists between Chad and Marie, and which only begins to dawn upon him when he spies them, with a "shock" (Amb 334), as they intrude, in careless intimacy, upon his reverie (his communion with the spirit of Lambinet) in the French countryside.

In order to ascertain how completely Strether has hoodwinked himself, we must consider how and why he has misconstrued the natures of each half of this amorous couple. Chad, who was formerly, to Strether's memory, an ordinary provincial fellow has, it seems, "improved greatly" in carriage and intelligence, "taste and conviction," (Amb 78 and 102) while under the influence of charming Paris and the tutelage of de Vionnet. Lambert wishes to discover an alter ego in this vigorous merchant prince. There are, Strether tells himself, "deep identities between them." (Amb 312)

Chad and he "know how to live" in "books and prints," (Amb 305), in the company of beautiful women, and in high ideals of heroic and chivalric responsibility. (Amb 285 and 350) Yet, Strether finally discovers, after his illusions have been suddenly stripped from him, that Chad, for all his imagined polish, "is, at bottom . . . only Chad." (Amb 350) The young man, supposed to be steeped in sophistication and high refinements of seemliness, is acutely interested in the family fortune and totally engrossed by the potential of "advertising" as "the secret of trade." (Amb 369) He is so far immune to the lures of Europe that he itches to get back to the factory and "make the whole place hum." (Amb 369)

Chad's mind seems as little changed as his taste. He remains mentally indolent and in "the habit of leaving things to others." (Amb 338) He has, in fact, much in common with the "beautiful . . . unconscious" Mamie Pocock, the Woollet girl whom his mother wishes him to wed. Chad is thoroughly American and his stay in Paris has been a lark, not the crusade Strether wants to make it. In spite of the dismayed editor's quaint and solemn protestation that only a "brute" and "criminal of the deepest dye" would desert such a lover as de Vionnet, he sees that his charge is "restless" and "tired of" his French mistress. (Amb 366 and 370) Young Newsome will return home, a more fervent capitalist for his refreshing holiday. Only Strether, whose mind is wont to "take flight" and forget "that things must have a basis"

(Amb 359) could picture a knight errant in such unlikely material.

There is evidence that he is no less deluded by the "beauty" and flawless manner of Marie de Vionnet. The "impression" she makes of "such variety, and yet such harmony" has left him long convinced that any "attachment" she should choose to make would be "virtuous." (Amb 359) He is beguiled by this striking woman who "spoke as if her art were all an innocence," (Amb 246) and he has fallen in love, if not with her exactly, at least with the urbane life she represents. Upon discovering "a lie in the charming" and supposedly platonic "affair" between Chad and Marie, however, he begins to suspect other sources of "ugliness" (Amb 346) might lie beneath this lady's benign exterior.

His suspicions come close to being confirmed in a visit he makes to Marie shortly after discovering that her tie with Chad was something more than platonic. This "generous, graceful" and "exquisite" woman (Amb 350) startles Strether by telling him "I've wanted you too." He is not quite sure how to take this, but the obvious note of promiscuity in it prompts him to beat a hasty retreat with the ungallant, but revealing reply, "Ah, but you've had me!" (Amb 353) Lambert has never spoken more truthfully. She has "had" not only his devotion and advocacy, but she has taken advantage of his gullibility as well. De Vionnet is

not as disinterested and noble as Madame Roland, the martyr of the Reign of Terror with whom Strether wishes to equate her. (Amb 345) Instead, she is riddled with human frailties, a touch of prurience and a talent for deception, which our hero, in his tendency to overvalue a gilded finish, cannot see. Indeed, she acts upon him as a catalyst which precipitates his "sudden gusts of fancy . . . odd starts of the historic sense, suppositions and divinations with no warrant but their intensity." (Amb 344)

Merely being wrong in one's initial observations about a complex and unfamiliar country and a few of its inhabitants would seem, on the surface, to be no great sin. Such interpretive errors as Strether makes are perfectly understandable and, in a person wise enough to remain merely an "observer," whose mistakes recoil only upon himself, excusable. Lambert, however, is compromised by the form his curiosity takes. Like the narrator in The Sacred Fount, he envies the professional artist and wishes to practice "the aesthetic touch" (Amb 122) himself. Also like the narrator, he is not overly particular about the materials which serve his "genius." (Amb 121) In his attempt to compensate for "the youth of his own that he had long ago missed," (Amb 303) Strether tries to manipulate other people's lives. He urges Bilham to propose to Mamie Pocock. (Amb 226) He takes it upon himself to thwart Mrs. Newsome's plans and champion Mme. de Vionnet's. Most of all, out of jealousy and a misbegotten sense of shared identities, he unwittingly presumes upon

Chad's tractable nature to direct the boy along the paths he, the neglected Lambert, would have taken in his own youth.

The overall anomaly of Strether's position is most fully revealed in the last two pages of the novel where Miss Gostrey offers herself to him in the demure phrase, "There's nothing . . . I wouldn't do for you." (Amb 374) Our hero, however, spurns her generous offer with the stodgy reply that he must "not, out of the whole affair, have got anything for myself." (Amb 375) Strether says this is "my logic," but for logic his statement is curiously inconsistent. He does not reject Maria on the reasonable grounds that he does not love her or that he finds something objectionable in her proposal. Furthermore, he has already received a great deal from his adventures in the form, which he has earlier admitted, of "amusement." (Amb 278) His highminded declaration comes a trifle late, and in the wrong context, to be convincing. He leaves himself open to an accusation of hypocrisy, for it appears that he is trying, belatedly, to justify his tampering and excuse his errors of judgment by affixing to them the least selfish motives.

In any case, it is strange that he, who has ostensibly renounced "the life of utility" and bewailed the rigid Puritanism of his past (Amb 158+239), should resort to such ethical flatulence at this late date. It is also somewhat difficult to discover, given the flat finality and irrelevancy of his utterance, any moral precedent for the stance he has

taken. Maria's implicit offer of affection and companionship is scarcely incompatible, should an unattached man in a secular calling choose to accept it, with any ethical system known to the Western World. Lambert is certainly free to refuse the offer, on its own terms, just as he is free to provide, or not, any reason whatsoever for his choice, so long as it (given the criterion of logicality which he, himself, has introduced) makes sense. On the surface, however, Strether's impromptu maxim is nonsense, and requires analysis of its hidden motives to become intelligible.

Strether's dismissal of Maria Gostrey and his decision to return to America is more than an oblique way of telling the lady that he does not love her or the life of a permanent tourist. He has also, it will be remembered, rejected the tactful advances of Marie de Vionnet. (Amb 350) He simply does not want to risk loving and being loved, any more than he wishes, on his own hook, to regard France as a land of commitment instead of merely "a land of fancy." (Amb 326) He is perfectly willing to make, in his role of enlightened advisor, any number of hard choices for Chad, little Bilham and the rest of the human community he walks among; but when challenged to respond in his own person, he quickly retreats behind the cover of a foolish rule. He has attempted, vicariously, to recapture his youth, and tried, simultaneously, and from the safety of his vantage point as spectator, to envision an ideal society whose foundations are derived from medieval romance and the pages



of Victor Hugo. (Amb 181) Before this artifice can be grafted onto the dazzling coterie of Chad's acquaintance, however, it collapses. With his puppets refusing to dance to his tune, Strether has no stomach (Amb 179) for an independent query through life (in such a confusing place as Paris) armed only with his meagre fund of wisdom, his "rag of reason," and with his own neck on the chopping block of possible failure. (Amb 300) Again, like the narrator in The Sacred Fount, once Strether's "house of cards" (SF 46) comes tumbling down, he elects to run away. Unlike Isabel Archer, who accepts the follies of the past and tries to build a better future upon the insights they have provided, while resisting the temptation of Casper Goodwood's largess and the prospect of forgetfulness, Lambert opts for "a sense of security" and the "simplification" (Amb 179) of a familiar, restrictive set of New England conventions. His ticket to fairyland--via the revival of an old, romantic legend, which is itself a dead convention--having been cancelled, he flees from self-direction by donning the old, moral overcoat of his native country.

The Wings of the Dove, published a year prior to The Ambassadors, depicts a multiple clash of moral perspectives which culminates in tragedy and overshadows, in seriousness at least, the mixed comedy and pathos of Strether's misadventures. The crucial conflict in the novel, with regard to ethical deviations and awakenings, occurs in the cruel

triangle formed between Milly Theale, the dove, and the clandestine lovers, Kate Croy and Merton Densher. Milly, modeled after James's beloved cousin Mary Temple, is tenderly constructed of admirable traits, but remains pretty much fixed in her kindness, generosity and mental vivacity throughout the book. In these qualities, plus the simple trust and unwavering fortitude with which she greets her friends and faces the inevitable issue of her terminal illness, Milly supplies the standard against which all other aspirants to virtue must be judged. Miss Croy and Mr. Densher do not measure up, so far as natural, unaffected probity goes, but they do provide, in their imperfections, a great deal of suspense and complication.

Kate Croy, the dominant personality in the novel from a standpoint of sheer energy, is handsome, alert and assertive. What is more, she is all these things in both a salutary and a detrimental sense. Her past is streaked with poverty, and her father's "Bohemian" lifestyle, but all her hopes and dreams, save one, are laced with pure conventionality. Her appearance in the novel coincides with the time of her flowering, both as a factor of economics and as a woman. She has escaped the penury of her childhood home and risen, with the aid of her wealthy aunt, Mrs. Lowder, to the plateau of, in Lawrence B. Holland's words, "grasping, middle-class England."<sup>1</sup> She has also fallen in love. The

<sup>1</sup>Laurence B. Holland, "The Wings of the Dove," The Expense of Vision (Princeton University Press, 1964); rpt.

latter fact threatens to diminish her good fortune and, on a number of counts, makes an awkwardness of her existence; for the man of her choice is a concession to the germ of idealism in her life. He is unacceptable to Aunt Maud, having no qualities or prospects easily transferable into liquid assets, and a living symbol for the "small piety" (WD 29) in her soul which still disdains the worship of material possessions and societal rank (WD 191 and 51)--the "Britannia of florid philistinism" (WD 29)--which her aunt embodies. Unfortunately, Kate feels the pull of materiality rather more than she is repelled by it, and an elopement with her secret fiancé, Merton Densher, would, no less than her persistence in "inpractical" ideals, separate her from Mrs. Lowder's favor.

Kate, however, is every bit as obstinate and ambitious as Maud, and most of her determined exertion in the book can be traced to her desire "to have everything" (WD 58), both her "distinguished creature," Merton, the living embodiment of her unworldly principles, and the "means" to exist in insular comfort and invulnerable respectability. It is her high office to reconcile somehow, anyhow, these antithetical objectives.

It is important, both toward an understanding of Kate and of the horns of the dilemma upon which she pinions her

in Henry James's Major Novels: Essays in Criticism,  
p. 287.

fellow creatures, to investigate Densher in himself and in her exalted opinion of him. In Miss Croy's eyes, Merton is quite a fellow; so much so, in fact, that the reader is informed, by her exaggerated response to him, of the shallowness and the narrowness of good example in the girl's haphazard education. She sees him, then, as a celebrant in the esoteric order of the intellect and a storehouse for "all the high, dim things she lumped together as of the mind." (WD 42) He has been schooled at various locations in Europe and has completed his course of studies at Cambridge. He uses impeccable grammar, is impressively aware of life's numbing complexities (WD 43), and works as a reporter on a newspaper where he is bored by the lack of exaction in his job. (WD 40)

In unvarnished actuality, however, Densher is both more and less than Kate takes him for. Far from being an intellectual or a free-thinking threat to the bourgeois "system," he is only "irregularly clever," a "respector . . . of custom," (WD 41) and very unsure of himself. He was born on foreign soil, the son of an itinerant, often impoverished, British army chaplain. He is deeply intimidated by "men of business" and by the hard, competitive society they have wrought in his father's native land. (WD 41) As a virtual outsider, "absent minded," a little "lazy," and very much "at sea" (WD 44), Densher is at a loss to pick a career for himself. Yet, as he is keenly aware, he needs one, a profitable one, now, in the light of his passion for Kate, more

than ever. In his vicissitudes, (his simultaneous contempt and respect for the engines of capitalism), anxiety and insecurity, Densher is attracted to, and quickly dependent upon, his prospective bride's "talent for life." It is Kate's dogged resourcefulness, plus her "physical beauty" and liveliness that form the cornerstone of Merton's infatuation. (WD 43) It is this same ruthless, striving spirit in her, however, that, when combined with his own lack of direction, makes him almost complaisant as an unthinking pawn, for much of the novel, in Kate's highhanded schemes and helps to precipitate his crisis of "scruples" (WD 271) at the end. Still, as we define the margins of his mistress's (a word used in the dual sense of sexual partner and figure of authority) battle plan, we shall discover that Densher is not quite the spineless object that Kate, in her arrogant deployment of him, unconsciously takes him for.

Kate Croy's grand design, the working out of which occupies most of the novel's action, is, simply put, a plot to entice each of the major characters with the form of companionship they most desire. For Milly Theale she intends to provide, in Merton Densher, the semblance of an attentive young Englishman's love. For Aunt Maud she plans an obedient niece, whose suitor and future husband can look forward to the adequate "prospect" of an inheritance. In front of Densher she dangles the carrots of sexual intimacy and solvency. For herself, as we have seen, she wants "everything"--the man of

her choice, Maud's benison in the form of money and position, and successful fruition of her cherished calculations.

She sees that Milly loves Densher, and she coerces the squeamish journalist to "pretend" affection for the American heiress. Kate senses that "something is wrong" with Miss Theale (WD 253), and supposes that Merton will not have to feign affection long before he benefits by the last will and testament of the grateful girl. Mrs. Lowder, meanwhile, will be appeased by Kate's apparent repudiation of a penniless newspaperman and, ultimately, pleased to welcome the wealthy one who comes to renew his courtship of her niece: It is all very straight and simple, or would be, were Densher quite as pliable as Kate hopes or were Kate quite as merciless and autocratic as her plan seems to imply.

It can be said for Kate that she honestly believes her dispensations will prove beneficial to all concerned. She thinks it a "kindness" to enliven Milly's last days with "a beautiful delusion." (WD 270) In her dealings with others, the activity that reveals the fountainhead of her moral vision, she is solely concerned with "making appearances . . . all right." (WD 252) She is tranquil in intrigue because she cannot see the brutality in her behavior. Moreover, she pragmatically protects herself from unpleasant revelations by avoiding any report of the particulars which attend, as consequences, the implementation of her will. (WD 255) Milly's sufferings, emotional and

physical, are merely unfortunate items to be used as means to a salubrious end, and she intends to ignore the former, while residing, aloof, in serene contemplation of the latter. Kate has learned, from her aunt and from her environment, not to question one's motives. To do so would be tantamount to challenging the norms of "social use" (WD 153) and the claims of private property; it would be "like changing one's bankers," as Maud puts it, and "one doesn't do that" (WD 155) for any thing so petty as a twinge of conscience. Finally, Kate's ethical guidebook is a translation of the ancient mercantile doctrine, mulus mulum scabit, "mule scratch mule," or, in modern terms, "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." The only difference is, that she, to give herself a little added advantage, seldom informs the other party as to the rate, or the method, of exchange.

Densher proves somewhat more difficult to control, however, than her own satisfactory sense of personal rectitude had been to arrange. He grows so uneasy in his role as Milly's informal suitor, that Kate, to reinforce his resolve, must accede to his demands for physical intimacy. (WD 380) This sexual pledge of good faith convinces Merton, for a time, to forget his doubts and bask in the secure knowledge that Miss Croy will see to everything. (WD 390) On the horrible day when Merton learns that Milly has been informed, by Lord Mark, of his deceit and, in Susan Stringham's words, 'has turned her face to the wall' (WD 403) in anguish and

despair, the young puppet's "loyalty" to Kate begins to dissolve. Humiliated and full of guilt, he returns to London (he has been in Venice to be near Milly) to compare notes with his mistress and await the issue of their conspiracy.

Not surprisingly, Miss Theale, in her unwavering generosity, has left him upon her death a great sum of money. Milly's gesture, however, has worked a change in Densher. He refuses to accept the settlement, and will marry Kate only upon the condition that she renounce the sum as well. Naturally, Kate rejects this absurd proposal and, casting about for an excuse for Merton's attitude, charges him with having "fallen in love" with the palpable memory of the dead girl. (WD 496) Her former fiance, however, a stranger to her now as he stands before her, insists that he is not and "never was in love with her."

Rather than the tangible Milly, or any recollection of her person, Densher has become devoted to the girl's character and the intangible qualities--mercy, munificence, and tenderness--which gave it life. Kate, on the other hand, has a conscience which registers only "sensible values." (WD 48) These lovers have won through adversity only to falter in victory, not because of a rival, a Lord Mark or a sacred image of Milly Theale, but because their moralities have grown irreconcilable. Kate is firmly "ensconced" at Lancaster Gate, Maud's "pompous house," among gaudy but



solid and fixed "things." (WD 468) Her virtue is all in her manner and her talent for temporization, her "high sobriety and her beautiful self-command." (WD 434) She will follow the road of "violent conformity" (WD 49) henceforth, seeking to work and justify her will under the blanket of common custom--the cold, impersonal mores of convention--whereas Den-  
 sher, the reader begins to feel, will attempt to reconstruct a better sense of himself in the arena of autonomous decision. Braced by Milly's example, he will start to stand up to life as he has stood up to Kate. Defying the lure of material well-being, and the anarchic pull of appetite, he shows signs of a firm determination to make his own way via the courage of his own convictions.

Maggie Verver, the heroine of James's last complete novel, The Golden Bowl, seems, at first, a very unlikely candidate for the wisdom she achieves by the final chapter of her convoluted history. She is the pampered, sheltered daughter of an American millionaire whose "acquisitive power" finds its proper channel in "vast modern machineries."<sup>1</sup> Maggie's own little universe has been singularly untroubled--all tribulations have been "screened out" of it--so that she observes, at the time we first encounter her, the larger, less comfortable world of the less protected beings around

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, The Golden Bowl, (1904); rpt. ed. and intro. John Halperin (New York: Meridian Books, World Publishing, 1972), p. 10.

her with the "laxity" and "superstition" (WD 11) of gauzy, childlike romanticism.

As the book opens, her father, Adam Verver, has managed to crown the wonderland in which his daughter resides by purchasing for her a genuine Italian Prince. He will be "her husband" and, as Maggie sees it, they will, after the manner of all the best legendary tales, 'live happily ever after.' In her ignorance of turmoil and conflict, she expects no difficulty to arise between Prince Amerigo and herself. She cannot see how dissimilar they are in attitude and heritage (GB 37)--different enough to make them virtual strangers for years in spite of the bond of marriage--but is naively secure in and thrilled by her romantic view of princes as a "meritorious" class. This "view" is not very precise or exacting. It regards the Prince as an office, or an artifact, molded or "stamped" with "mediaeval" escutcheons (WD 15), and imprinted, by years of tradition, with the graces and arts of "quality." As a man, Maggie only knows, and is satisfied by her skimpy knowledge, that the Prince seems "nice." (WD 315)

Amerigo, whose view of his marriage is utilized almost exclusively in the first half of the novel, could scarcely be emptier than Maggie's conception of him, but he can be, and usually is, worse. The plot of the book turns upon an act of adultery, committed by the Prince and Mrs. Charlotte Verver (nee Charlotte Stant) who is the wife of

Adam, was Maggie's best friend, and had been, in the distant past before the Ververs ever entered the picture, Amerigo's paramour. More will be said about this active lady in due course, but, for the moment, our attentions will try to bring her partner into focus. It can be said for the somewhat ignoble nobleman that he has not initiated the illicit affair, but has been led, or talked, into it. It can also be placed in his favor that he had an excuse, although not a sufficient one, for seeking companionship from another source than his wife. With some justification, he looks upon Maggie as a child (GB 67+207), yet he does not sound her out or try to rectify this imbalance in their emotional ages.

He resents, and he has every right to do so, the unspoken assumption, on Maggie's and especially on Adam's part, that he, Amerigo, is but a commodity in a business contract and not an individual to be acknowledged and befriended. (GB 20) To this bewildered gentleman, it appears that his marriage is a commercial enterprise instead of a union of possible affections, and this view is strengthened by the fact that his wife, as was her habit before being wed, elects to spend most of her time, not with her husband, but in silent communion with her father. (GB 107) Nevertheless, the Prince, who tries to be a man of his word, (GB 9) determines, in the beginning, to maintain "a perfect accord between conduct and agreements." (GB 35) Finally, Amerigo, a man who wishes to be "kind" and has aversions to

"injuring others," (GB 41), has not bartered his bachelor-hood in order to put Maggie's money (GB 54) to entirely selfish uses; rather, he intends to apply the dowry to move his ancestral home, "a big black palace," from under "a cloud of mortgages." (GB 115)

Having said this much in his behalf, there remain many flaws and shortcomings in the Prince which help to explain his lapse into infidelity. All in all, he is a man of "much more surface than depth." (GB 70) He is a fatalist and a pessimist. He is fully conscious of his "antenatal history"--a long succession of powerful, even fervent clerics, rulers and statesmen--and is oppressed by the "vices" that attend the march of mankind through time. (GB 10) Recoiling before the "uglinesses" in his family's past, he develops, in reaction, a deep-seated moral lassitude. As he informs Mrs. Assingham:

'Your moral sense works by steam--it sends you up like a rocket. Ours is slow and steep and unlighted, with so many of the steps missing that . . . it's just as short to turn round and come down again.' (GB 21)

Amerigo has ceased to care very much about ethical questions. Instead he relies on his ability to "adjust his manner" and present an "historic front" (GB 26 and 29) of inveterate charm and tact to guide him through any and every human encounter. Thus he can, as he usually chooses, "turn all to the easy" (GB 28) in the matter of communication. His highly trained aesthetic sense, which can evaluate the

quality of an art object instantly, (GB 80) is similar to this mechanical response to people. He has a kinship with Mrs. Gareth in this. People were "human furniture" to him also. (GB 38) His exquisite manner is an inferior substitute for an active moral curiosity, for it ignores the "submarine depths" of the precious human forms (so like, in the immediate functioning of his taste, the precious object of art) which he thoughtlessly classifies according to rank. (GB 75) Amerigo is good-natured, but superficial; he "liked all signs that things were well, but he cared rather less why they were." (GB 96)

In keeping with his cavalier attitudes, the Prince aspires to lead "a life . . . deliciously dull." (GB 140) In his "fine unconscious way" he relinquishes, passively, the "greater poetry of . . . Roman life" (GB 235), and falls gracefully into the bland "conventions" of upper-class "Personages" in England. (GB 216) He becomes a carbon copy of the English aristocrat, replete with all the regalia and ritual--the "rounds of visits" and holidays at noble estates (GB 251) and the sedentary refuge from time-to-time, at one's Club--necessary to complete the picture. He is, as these remarks indicate, both agreeable and amenable. Having little interest in the souls of others, he seldom bothers to consult the recesses of his own nature in order to discover some immutable principle of direction. Being thus disinclined to forge his own way and formulate answers for himself, he

"liked explanations" and "was more or less dependent upon them" and upon the people who, for reasons of their own, chose to give them out. (GB 113) As a result of this weakness of character, the Prince is quite vulnerable to the more forceful, habitually organizing types, like Adam Verver, who decides to direct the nobleman's life for his daughter's sake, and the predatory types, like Charlotte, who "with her motive . . . of self" (GB 154) and her "feeling for her own pleasure" (GB 188), decides to make of him a handsome playmate.

Another factor underlying Amerigo's breach of allegiance is the irritating sense of inferiority which festers in him, in spite of himself, as he continues to rub shoulders with go-getting capitalists and strident citizens in his "strange" new homeland which made Rome seem, by comparison, "a family party, a little old-world spinnet." (GB 70) He feels, for example, "just a shade humiliated" by his inability to grasp the "new arithmetic" of modern commerce (GB 70) or the "scientific" men who wound it up and let it fly. (GB 11) He is so determined "not" to appear a "fool" (GB 251) that his natural tendency to rely upon anyone who is, or seems, widely knowledgable (like Charlotte) is doubly reinforced.

Finally, the Prince is susceptible to Charlotte's advances because of a deeply-ingrained attitude of machismo.

He had never, as he tells Maggie, paid much attention to "plain" women (GB 116) and the only sort of attention he knew how to pay attractive women "was more or less to make love to them." (GB 14) When Charlotte offers herself, he feels compelled to act "as any" genuine man--any "galant-uomo"--would. (GB 238) After the fact of his faithlessness, he consoles himself, and tries to obliterate any qualms of guilt, by managing to feel insulted that his wife has expected him to associate so much with a beautiful woman like Charlotte and, through all that contact, maintain "a state of childlike innocence." (GB 238)

Still, for all Amerigo's frailties, it took a good deal of energy for anyone to overcome his usual inertia and his inbred sense of honor. The dynamo who reads the Prince, and plays upon the voids and "cracks" (GB 97) in his character as if they were so many holes in a flute, is Charlotte Stant. She is the last, and perhaps the most ruthless, in a long line of headstrong, self-centered and clever, but extremely robust and beautiful women who, from Christina Light to Mme. de Vionnet, work their own wills in James's novels by exploiting, deliberately or not, the influential men who seek their company. Like Madame Merle, Charlotte is an expatriate American of no rank, but many attainments. (GB 38) Also like her earlier counterpart, Miss Stant is compelled, having no fortune or high connection of her own, to "loss about" (GB 19) from house to British house in the

role of well-mannered, decorative guest. (GB 33)) Consequently, she, as Serena had done before her, becomes something of a "huntress" (GB 33) in response to her view of life as a jungle. She becomes aggressively self-serving, because she has learned that she must get all she can, whenever she can, on her own initiative. (GB 188)

One of the things she requires, obviously, is money. She gets that, with gullible Maggie's help, by marrying Adam Verver. Another thing she wants is the Prince, and she gets him as she would a prize animal, purely by stealth. Measuring "public opinion, the moral law, and the margin allowed a husband" (or a wife) to a nicety, (GB 43) she seduces Amerigo while their respective spouses, father and daughter, are, as was their custom, off somewhere together. Coming at her prey from many directions, she outwits the Prince and deftly turns his many weaknesses against him. She stuns him and puts him off his guard by openly admitting that she "loves him." (GB 213) Next, she works the ploy of mutual commiseration and identity, assuring the Prince that "you're not . . . too different from me" and condoling with him over the hard fact that "we're immensely alone." (GB 217 and 219) Finally, with Amerigo well inside the trap, she fastens the lock by suggesting, on "a very high level of debate" (GB 212) that their highest duty consists, not in avoiding one another, but in avoiding any mention of their intimacy to Adam and Maggie.



By a "complicated twist" of reasoning she convinces the Prince, who, as we have noted, is unaccustomed to strenuous thought, that since they, Charlotte and Amerigo, are destined for one another, and since their mates seem not to appreciate them, they would do best for everyone concerned by having their affair and keeping it quiet. The Prince and she need a different kind of love than do the "innocent" Maggie and Adam. Yet, to confess adultery would be to confuse and hurt the "poor ducks" needlessly. (GB 217) Therefore, while father and daughter need each other so much, and seem to need their mates so little, and since Charlotte and Amerigo need more than they are getting, yet hate to disturb their mates, it is, in Mrs. Verver's opinion, nothing "vulgar or horrid" to "take things as they are" (GB 215) and make the best of them. Thus, with a kiss, "grasping and grasped" they seal their "noble" and "sacred . . . pledge." (GB 220)

It would not be too much to say that Amerigo wants, very much, to be brought over to Charlotte's contorted view of their situation. On the other hand, however, he does not see the whole of Charlotte's perspective. He feels sorry for her (GB 36), and lusts for her, but he cannot discern, being so incurious about people's inner workings, the egoism and cynicism that color her perceptions. She may "love" him above all men, yet she has a very strong contempt for men in general, thinking them all, the best and the worst, to be "brutes." (GB 204) She not only professes a moral

relativism of the most extreme sort in her implication that what Adam and Maggie can not see will not hurt them, she is also, at the core of her being, an amoral despot in her campaign to arrange all circumstances, from "the conscious humility of her dress" (GB 210) to the most profound allegiances between human "specimens" (GB 188), in order that she might "do as she liked." (GB 211)

It is not immaterial that James likens Maggie to an acrobat walking along "the edge of a chasm" (GB 363) in her struggle to overcome the handicap of her simplistic, circumscribed outlook and grasp, much less find countermeasures for, the venalities, jealousies, presumptions and strategems of the other characters in the novel. It is to her everlasting credit that she, and she alone of the entire company, does penetrate to the foundations of these complex natures and even achieves a perspective that balances their several viewpoints with her own. Almost incredibly, she "the little American wife" so full of "little rules" and "little limits," (GB 114 and 206) grows beyond her own narrow boundaries and comes to understand the shortcomings of her loved ones without appropriating, in imitation or in spite, any of their flaws.

The Princess, as she comes of age, emotionally and spiritually, has a number of models, from her immediate human environment, to choose among with regard to future patterns of behavior. She could emulate her friend and

confidante, the gossipy, matchmaking Mrs. Fanny Assingham, and attempt to lead a safe, secondhand life in the midst of other people's business. (GB 61) She might take a page from her husband's faultless training and "beautiful personal presence " (GB 29), or from his apprehensive need to find refuge, among unfamiliar "types" and settings, in the false sympathy of a more authoritative figure. She could opt to simply slip back into the blissful ignorance and naive egoism that still bolsters her father's monotonous optimism. (GB 539) Or, like Charlotte, she could learn, with resentment, the carnivorous law of survival of the fittest, and seek her own satisfaction at the expense of the weak or timid.

She sees through and spurns all of these myopic alternatives, but, more importantly, she refuses to spurn their owners. Like Huck Finn, Maggie learns, through the difficult process of accepting her own mistakes, her own blameworthiness, to detest the crime, yet forgive the criminal. Maggie attains adulthood by mixing an ounce or two of compassion with the recipes for good and evil. Upon perceiving the illicit relationship between her husband and her mother-in-law--a liaison that well might, in its overtones of incest, enrage even a disinterested observer with a greater fund of rigid rectitude--Maggie does not self-righteously expose her rival in a rush of vengeance. Rather, she gently and tactfully informs the Prince of her knowledge,

and leaves it to him to break the affair off, if he so chooses, by simply ceasing to associate with Mrs. Verver. This may seem cruel to those who do not know Charlotte as Maggie does. The most important thing in the world to Mrs. Verver is her "pride," (GB 519) and Maggie has permitted-- out of concern for her father as much as for the vanquished lady--her former friend to save face. Seeing that the Prince obviously no longer wants her, Charlotte makes it plain that it is her decision to return with her benighted husband to America. (GB 540)

Similarly, rather than railing against Fanny for her unconscionable meddling, the Princess (who is, now, a regal figure in spirit as well as in name) sympathizes with the older lady's inward torture at the way things have turned out, and allows Mrs. Assingham to remain an outwardly honored member of her court, even though she is no longer quite trusted with the secrets of her heart. (GB 517 and 525) Out of compassion for Adam, the Princess does not avail herself of the ancient privilege of little girls to cry on their daddies' shoulders when misfortunes fall. She is not quite certain how much Mr. Verver knows of her unhappiness, but she is certain that he will not hear of it from her. (GB 523)

Finally, she refrains from throwing jealous fits and berating her Prince for his inconstancy. In spite of his flaws, she loves him and hopes to make a better future "with

him." (GB 515) In facing up to his imperfection she confronts him as an individual and cuts through the glorious nimbus of a merely inherited nobility which had, for so long, stood, like a haze of traditions and ceremony, before her eyes. Amerigo has been her occasion for growth, for in him, and by her unreasoning, passionate affection for him, she has had to endure the sobering lesson of the Fall of Man from the grace of her childish golden myth. Her own particular knowledge, her own special bloody entry into a corruptible world, arises from the hard lesson aptly, if somewhat caustically, put by Ambrose Bierce in this fashion: "A prince is a gentleman who, in romance, bestows his affections on a peasant girl, and in real life, on his friends' wives."<sup>1</sup>

There is, in this statement of contrast, a trove of reinforcement for a cynic or a defeatist. There is also, however, as Maggie finds, an opportunity--if the peasant girl does love her Prince and the Prince, in turn, finds something quite forceful, and quite valuable in the girl--to pardon the past and build within the present. Such a job requires the objectivity to identify the rifts and chasms between them and the wisdom to discover and preserve whatever seeds of mutual respect and affection still exist.

<sup>1</sup>Ambrose Bierce, The Enlarged Devil's Dictionary, ed. Ernest J. Hopkins (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967), p. 223.

Just as Maggie is willing to wait, patiently, while Amerigo recovers from his attachment to Charlotte (GB 536) so, the reader feels, she will be willing and able to meet him more than halfway in their task of reconstruction. The Prince, at least, has noticed the peasant girl, and come to suspect that there is much more to her than has previously met his eye. (GB 533)

Finally, Maggie's twofold external awareness of appearances and precepts, and her twofold internal understanding of the realities and rights of self and others, are made possible by her refusal to walk either entirely alone or unquestioningly with the crowd. Unlike Charlotte, who looks out only for herself, Maggie can see through the eyes of others. Yet, she does not abdicate her personality entirely by trying to conform to the norms established by the greatest number of those others. Unlike Strether, who wavers between the theocentric convention that shaped, and fettered him and the anachronistic convention of chivalry which he prefers, and who flees to the enveloping safety of the former when the latter falls in ruin, Maggie refuses to enlist in either of the two catchall systems of programmed conduct that frame her life. She sees beyond both the "monomania" of her father and the practiced demeanor, the trained "manners" and evasions of human contact, employed by the Prince.<sup>1</sup> Maggie, following the

<sup>1</sup>The Prince in his garrulous dependence upon others, and Adam Verver, in his mute and absolute reliance only upon himself, represent opposite extremes of conventionality.

dictates of her personal priorities--the loves she cannot

Mr. Verver, a successful American industrialist, has turned, with a single-minded fervor, from the limited world of high finance to the equally limited realm (in his particular approach) of art collecting.

James's description of this American's avid connoisseurship casts serious doubts upon his taste. For one thing, Adam has had virtually no background in aesthetics. In the presumptuous American tradition of instantaneous "know-how," he has gone directly from a dubious talent for picking out hats and dresses, "ribbons, frills and fine fabrics," (GB 99) for his wife and daughter--via the nebulous route of "dormant intelligence" (GB 98)--to the wholesale selection and purchase of objets d'art from every corner of Europe. Like Christopher Newman, Mr. Verver is more impressed by size and quantity than by quality. (GB 146 and 227)

Adam has, quite simply, redirected his "power of acquisition" from the arenas of commerce and his portfolio of stocks and bonds to the mystical sphere of the fine arts. He attempts to exercise the same instincts for business and "sensibilities to the currents of the market" (GB 102), which had worked so well in Wall Street, in the art galleries of the world. He achieves only moderate success in this effort, however, because his "taste" is "more indulgent" than his financial acumen. (GB 140) Whereas, worthless securities would not tempt him, his primitive sense of aesthetics leaves him susceptible to fakes and forgeries among paintings and statuary. Moreover, he cares little whether his collected artifacts are genuine so long as they "look like" the masters to whom "they are deceitfully attributed." (GB 103)

Adam is a rugged, unreflecting pioneer in a sophisticate's field. His artistic evaluations are crude and uninformed, but, in his Yankee pride and independence, he feels that he "needs . . . no instruction" in any pursuit "from any one on earth." (GB 102) His taste is suspect, but his motives are abundantly clear. Like other millionaires of his day--Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller spring to mind--Adam wishes to build, with ostensibly philanthropic funds, an American art museum. It will be outwardly dedicated to the deprived masses, but it will correspond, in actual fact, to his keen desire to erect a monument to himself. (GB 102) Verver's "generosity" is merely a front for the "principle of pride" and the "egoism" that drive him. (GB 104)

The American businessman does not talk much, even to his beloved daughter. This is because, like many self-made men, he has faith only in himself and his own counsel. Instead of an aesthetic flame, he is animated by a narrow, insular arrogance of self-reliance. Amerigo, on the other

overlook--achieves an imaginative balance, a creative synthesis between the provinces of the ideal and the real, the conciliatory dream of reunion and the inescapable facts of collision and conflict.

Unlike The Wings of the Dove and The Ambassadors which culminate in dissolution, The Golden Bowl, thanks to the cement of Maggie's creative conduct, ends in uneasy harmony. Everyone in the novel winds up constructively companioned--Mrs. Assingham is restored to her long-suffering Colonel, Mrs. Verver is placed in a mutually advantageous relationship with her husband,<sup>1</sup> and Maggie and Amerigo give each other another chance. The equilibrium is tenuous, but it may last if Maggie's friends show any capacity to learn from her example. At the very least, the novel's resolution shows that Henry James, in his own balanced view of the struggle between dreams and harsh realities, "believed" in the power of "difficulty" not only to shape, but also to threaten forever the best laid plans of the truly

hand, represents the "common convention" of prostitution (GB 146). Pessimistic and insecure, ashamed of his antecedents and himself, he, like the European who eagerly traffic in the "treasure" of their past with the "American collector" (GB 139), tries to profit by being controlled. The Prince is talkative, but communicates little. He is full of questions, but has no answers. Maggie, in her fund of good judgment, avoids both the provincial convention of conceit and the urbane system of subservience.

<sup>1</sup>Charlotte finally falls into a role she has prepared for all her life. She is wealthy now and, in keeping with her regimen of "accomplishments," will explain (as Adam, in his ignorance and silence, cannot) her husband's huge collection of art objects to gaping onlookers.



"responsible agent."<sup>1</sup>

Maggie's success in deriving a synthesis--wherein she penetrates appearances and discovers, by weighing personal goals against the requisites of empathy and duty, their meanings--must be qualified. On the level of the individual, her awakenings and resolutions are obviously not universal. Those of us who are still entranced by the prospect of marrying Princes or Princesses, football heroes or cheerleaders, would scarcely, it seems to me, have sufficient detachment to benefit by the lessons of The Golden Bowl. On a cultural level, the clash between continents which held such promise for reciprocal enlightenment in 1904, when The Golden Bowl was published, in the subsequent light of the World Wars which exposed the impotency and blindness of the ruling classes in Europe, and in view of the gradual bankruptcy of America's "cloistered innocence," to have lost much of its educating potential. Huck Finn can no longer "light out for the Territory" to escape the evils of mass "sivilizing" any more than a modern-day Maggie Verver can travel across the Atlantic in the confident hope of finding an array of civilization's uncompromised virtues--the variety and refinements of form and expression, both human and material, that betoken centuries of effort at relationship and self-awareness.

<sup>1</sup>In a letter to William Dean Howells, 1908, James asserted that, "at bottom, only difficulty interests me. . . ." (Letters of Henry James, Vol. II, p. 118).

Maggie's admirable "tightrope act" whereby she keeps the purposes and privileges of others in view in order to redefine and redirect her own ongoing aspirations, is instructive, but it also, in its results, fails of universality. She still has much to learn about her Prince, she barely knows her silent father, and she has only begun to see through "the rigor of conventions" and the "tide of manners" which characterize the human arena of Europe. (AB 231) Similarly, although she stands high among the Jamesian registers in the efficacy of her "open imagination" and her empathetic powers of reconciliation, she has only just begun to perceive and develop herself.

The final force of James's synthesis is not to be found in Maggie, or in any other of his many creatures. Rather, it is found in the novel itself--a work of artistry which is also an explication of human motives. The Jamesian novel is a coherent symbol, as well as a fictional history, which emanates from and embodies both channels of the imagination. It binds the quest for self-expression in articulate form to the impulse to comprehend, objectively, the human factor in and through experience.

This is not to discount the Princess altogether, by any means. The outcome of her strenuous labor for rapprochement may be less than satisfactory, but her methods--which are, to a great extent, identical to the creative procedures of the novelist who brought her into being--are indisputably

salutary. Just because Maggie has not solved all her problems completely does not mean that she has not proceeded in the best way possible. Her "way," moreover, is the path of the genuine artist, the artist in spirit, as opposed to the worker in selfish designs or even the shortsighted professional craftsman. Like her creator, Maggie sounds (as well as she is able) the depths of the human element--delves into her own soul and the souls of those about her--before she attempts to cast her tentative solutions in articulate form.

Henry James, who believed that "relations stop nowhere," (AN 5) was not bent upon appending final resolutions to all the conflicts and human tensions in his tales. Instead, using the same double-charged imagination that the Princess, (in her smaller allotment of ingenious firepower) employs, he struggled to depict his many figures in the act of decision and in their potential for further growth. The balance he sought between surface and content, external aspect and internal reaction, is one that transcends the minute victories and defeats of any individual. He hoped, through his novels, not to instruct us openly, but to show us a few of the constructive and creative means to a fuller awareness and a more rewarding--more fully engaged--existence.

Late in his career, at the conclusion of his final review of Gustave Flaubert, James wistfully expressed the "happy none" that "we," his faithful readers as well as

himself, "are pretty well all novelists now."<sup>1</sup> A few years later he rang down the curtain on his brief, unfortunate feud with H. G. Wells by opining that "art makes life" by "making it as interesting as possible."<sup>2</sup> James did not mean by these utterances that he felt his audience should consist entirely of professional writers, nor that he thought that the sublime sphere of art--the happy region of invention, selection and technique--ought to be considered wholly superior to "life" and sufficient in itself. Indeed, we have explored throughout this chapter his impatience with pure aestheticism and his contempt for those subjective attitudes and fancies that detach individuals, in their "horrible indifference to anything but self," (AN 83) from the rest of the human community. Rather, James meant, in his critique and his letter, to intimate the most fundamental purposes behind his writings and also the effects that he thought they should have.

For Henry James, art was a way of life, a vocation instead of a hobby or a trade. To become an artist, a genuine artist, was not to become a technician or a preacher, but a special kind of philosopher. Art does not, according to this view, supplant or ignore life; it completes our glimpse into chaotic actuality by training the eye, and the

<sup>1</sup>The Future of the Novel, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>The Letters of Henry James, Vol. VI, p. 490.

heart, to pick and choose the moments most pregnant with meaning; the "extraordinary" moments. (AN 263) It enhances these instants, making them memorable and assuring their survival, by disclosing them through legible images and enclosing them in frames of surpassing beauty or arresting ugliness. The artist, obviously, must see through surfaces in order to arrange his portraits in accordance with the lessons he finds in life. His artistic vision is "an education" (AN 61) as well as a tool, for it opens to him, in his close study of motives as well as the formal dispositions of matter, the lasting truth that "our behavior and its fruits are essentially one and continuous" and that "the act has its way of abiding and showing and testifying." (AN 347)

One must understand Man to be able to select and illustrate His self-revealing act, but once one has done both--perceived and painted--James's "mixture" or "synthesis" (AN 116) is accomplished. Appearances are then forced to coalesce in "the impress that forms an identity." (AN 47) They are made to disclose, to the "feeling and seeing" observer, the many "meanings" that they are "charged with." (AN 41) Art, in the final Jamesian analysis, "makes life" only in the sense that it prepares us to live responsibly by sharpening our eyesight and refining our affections.

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